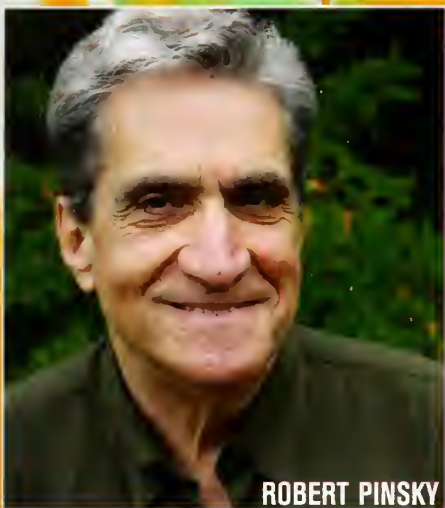


# PROVINCETOWN ARTS

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volume 27  
annual issue 2012/13



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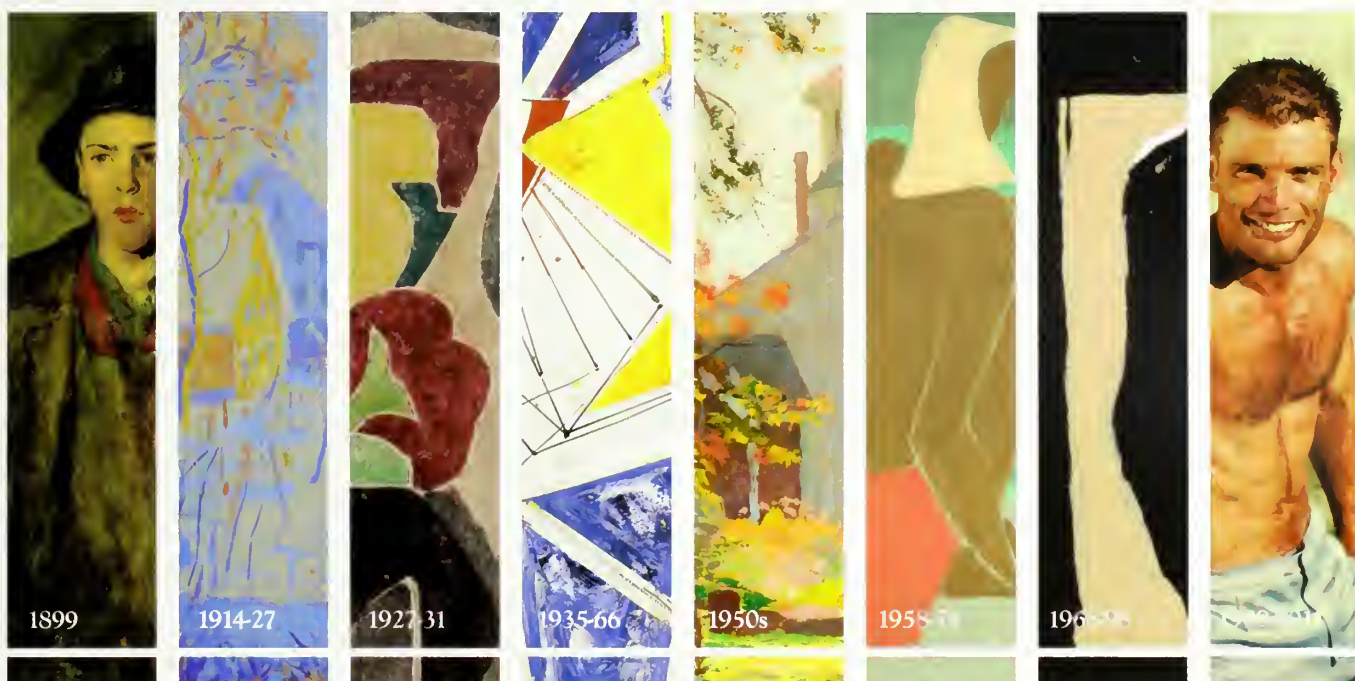
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Hans Hofmann (1880-1966), *Lighthouse*, 1936, casein on board, 20 x 24 inches

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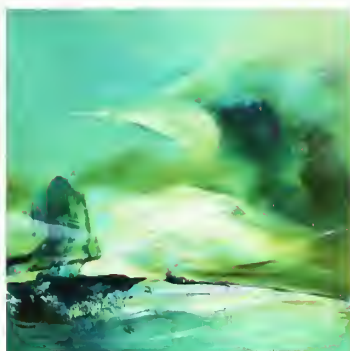
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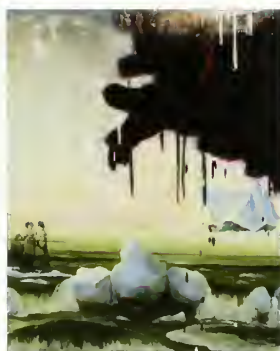
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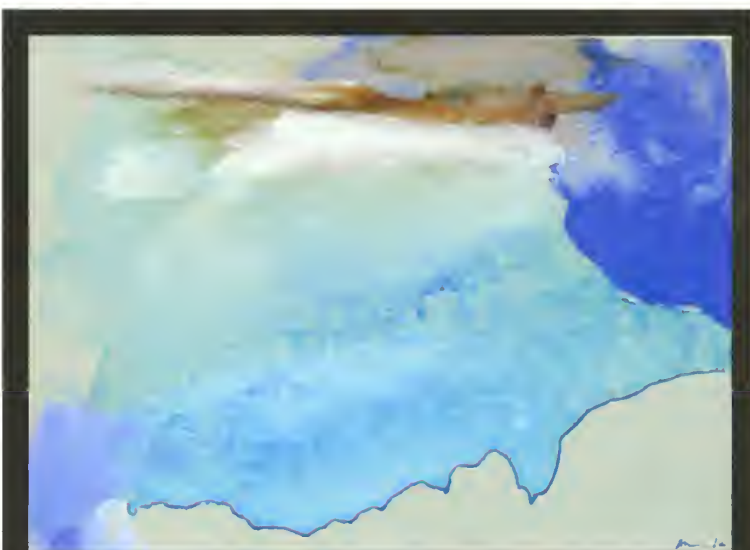
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Li Wang, Crossing 12-1, ink on rice paper, 16 x 17"



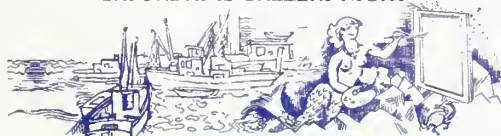
Li Wang - Crossing, July 6 - 19

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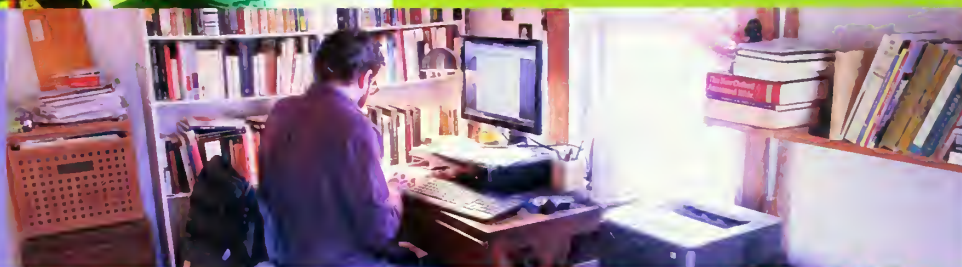


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## SUMMER EXHIBITIONS

Art of the Garden  
May 4—July 15

Members 12 x 12 Silent Auction  
May 11—July 14

Myrna Harrison: Northeast by Southwest  
May 18—July 15

Carmen Cicero: The Visionary Work  
May 25—July 8

Auction June 16  
Preview: June 1—16

20th Anniversary Curating Show  
June 22—July 8

Long Point: An Artists' Place  
July 13—September 2

Robert Motherwell: Beside the Sea  
July 20—September 30

PAAM Collection  
July 20—September 2

Members Juried: Miniatures  
September 7—November 11

Auction September 22  
Preview: September 7—22

LOWF Recipients  
September 7—23

Taro Yamamoto  
September 28—November 25

PAAM Collection  
September 28—November 11

Painting a Building: Building a Painting  
The Art of Susan Baker  
October 5—December 2

Guess Who's Coming To Dinner at PAAM  
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October 6

Lillian Orlowsky/William Freed  
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Robert Motherwell, *Blue Guitar*, 1990, © Dedalus Foundation, Inc./ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY



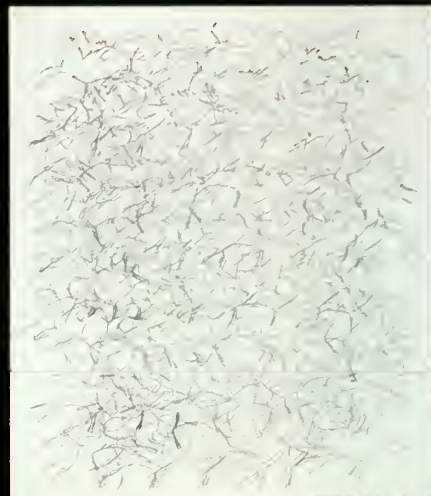
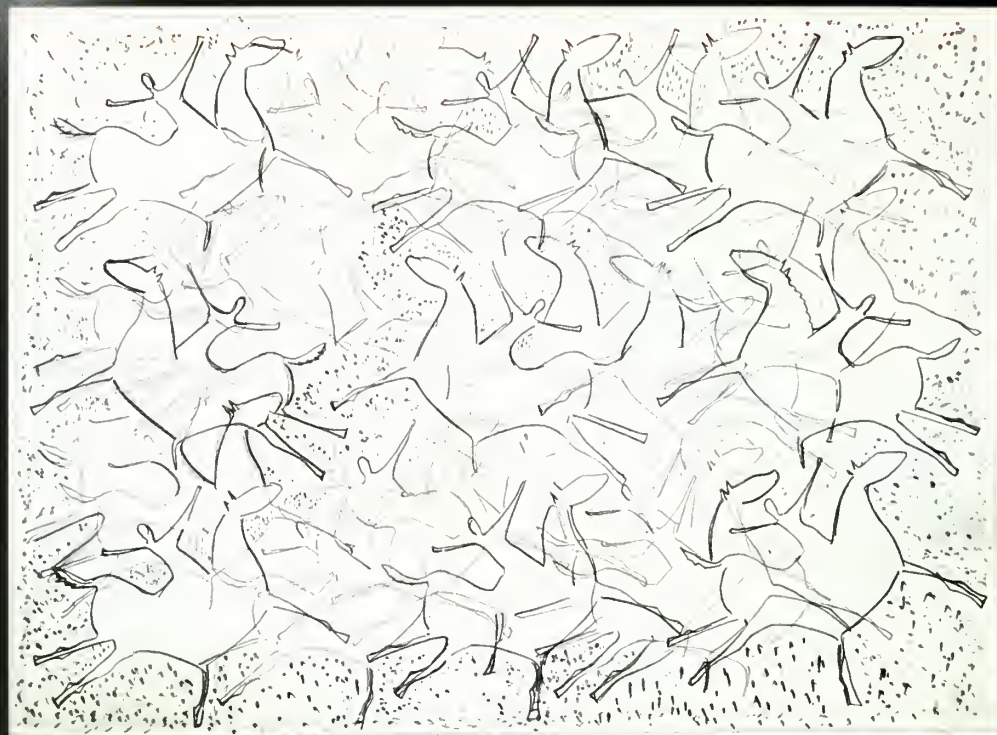
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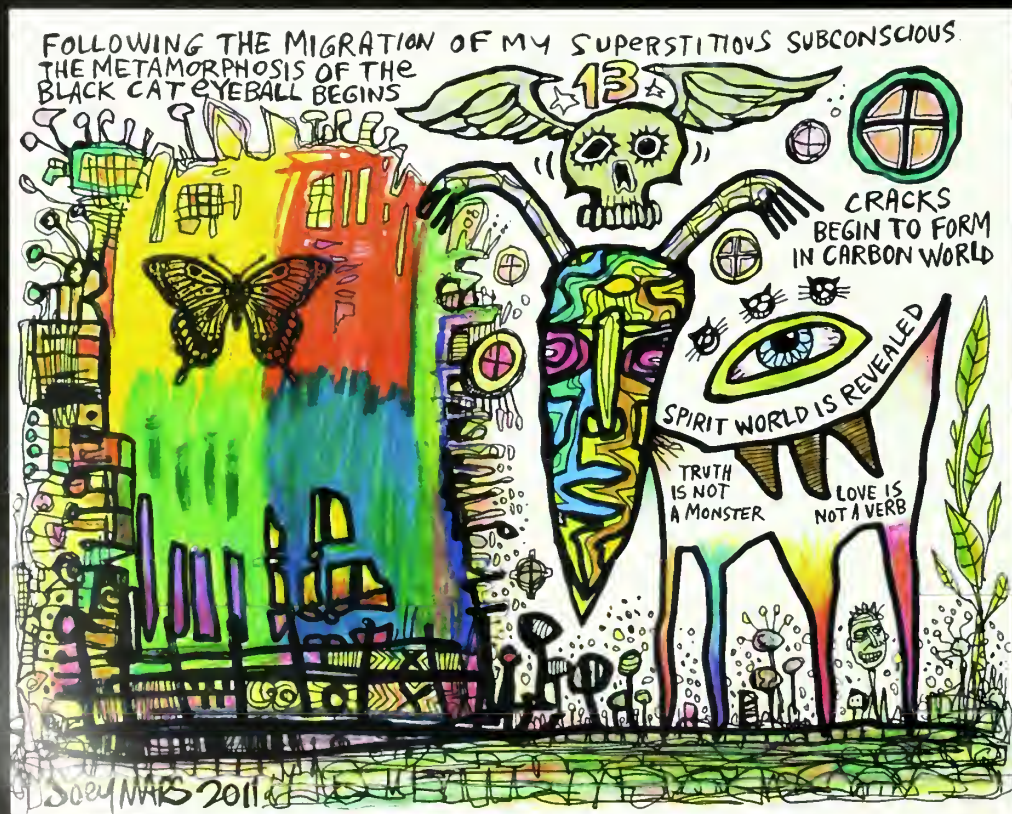
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**Richard Pepitone**

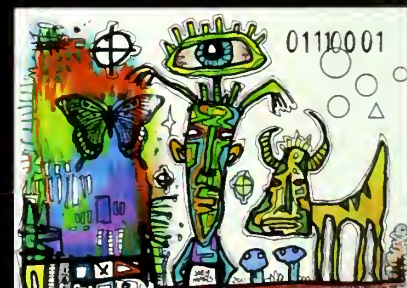
Above: "Wild Things"  
graphite on paper 26x19 in.

Left: "Rodeo"  
graphite on paper 14x16 in.  
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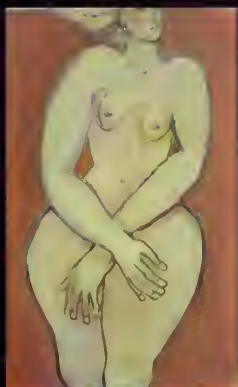
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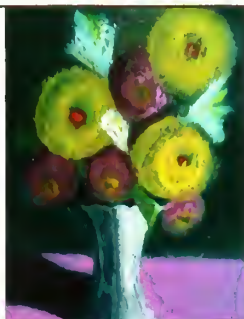
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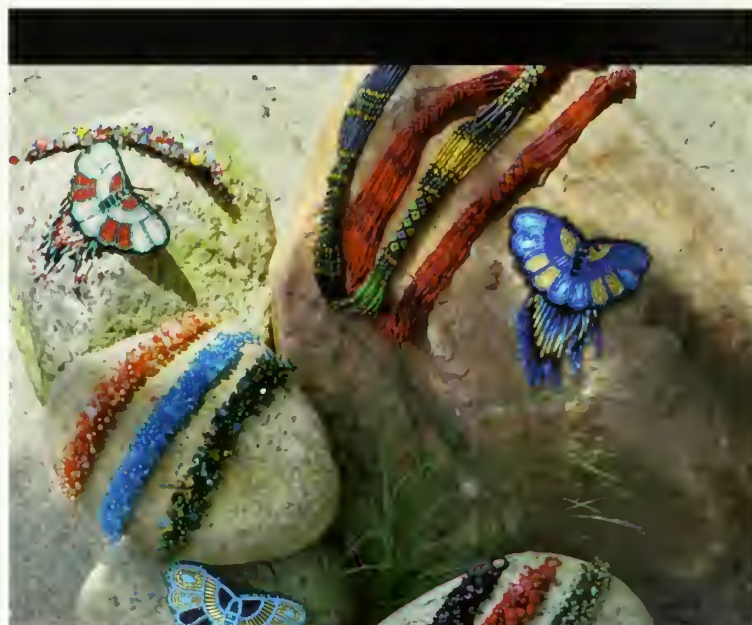
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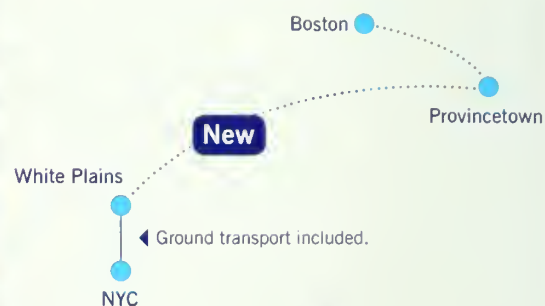
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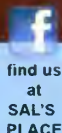
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1993	BEST AMERICAN POETRY
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1991	BEST AMERICAN POETRY
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# PROVINCETOWN ARTS 2012

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# PROVINCETOWN ARTS

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## ARTISTS

**Madeliene Abling** was a lawyer in Orlando, Florida, for fifteen years; then she tired of sending the white light of a legal theory through the prism of facts to see what color-coded elements appeared as witnesses to prove her case. She knew there must be another way, and she and her partner purchased a forty-two-foot cabin cruiser, planning to live on the water for awhile, cruising up the East Coast to places like Provincetown. With water moving beneath her, Abling began, without instruction, to paint—her partner, Vicky, had given her a set of paints for her birthday, with intuitive understanding of Abling's deep urge to find a new mode of expression. Abling's career accelerated after she began to use the broad span of a palette knife to paint "bigger," inspired by the bold, bright colors of Florida, but integrated into the experience of living on the sea. The result was *EZ Breezy*, her portrait of five or six small, almost toy-like sailboats with enormous, multicolored sails billowing and showing the shape of the wind. Abling will show this summer as a new member of ERNDEN Fine Art Gallery in Provincetown.



Charles Cooper, *Self-Portrait in Mirror*, 2002

**Charles Cooper**, now a veteran artist, got his start while studying at Vesper George School of Art in Boston in the late forties. Like most of his classmates who would come to be associated with Provincetown—Sal Del Deo, Robert Douglas Hunter, Varujan Boghosian, Ciro Cozzi, Ray Rizk, and others—Cooper was supported by the GI Bill. During the summer, most of the group made an exodus to Provincetown to study with Henry Hensche, who had mesmerized students in a memorable demonstration at Vesper George. In his unpublished memoir, *An Artist's Life Journey*, Cooper gives a glimpse of a young artist's choices: "Henry had in his classes many students who had studied under illustrious teachers at the Art Students League in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, or the Academy in Philadelphia. In a word, they were sophisticates whom Hensche had to convince that Charles Hawthorne's method of color perception had merit, and was superior. He was not always successful because not every student thought that truth of color was the most important element in painting."

**David Dunlap**, an architectural writer for the *New York Times*, is close to finishing his historic project of documenting every single building in Provincetown, knitting together information and social commentary about the vital history of the space. Organized geographically, house number by house number, the website ([www.buildingprovincetown.wordpress.com](http://www.buildingprovincetown.wordpress.com)) maps and animates the living history of the community via the ghosts of the former inhabitants.

**Etta Goodstein**, a prominent goldsmith in Dennis, this spring became the first jeweler to have an exhibition at the Cape Cod Museum of Art, *Jewelry as Art: A Forty-Year Retrospective*. The progression of her work was represented in four large glass cases, showcasing her early pieces in silver and gold and her increasing use of gemstones in necklaces, bracelets, broaches, pins, pendants. She is noted for her selection of Australian opals, particularly the prized black opals from the Lightning Ridge mines in New South Wales—the deep background color a result of volcanic ash from the area. Precious opals are called "noble" because of their uniqueness, identified when a stone is shown being turned, the motion releasing fleeting, fire-like iridescence. Waves of color bend around obstacles in a phenomenon known as diffraction, spreading out in expanding patterns from small openings. Goodstein is keenly aware that jewelry is a three-dimensional art, something worn to adorn, identify, comfort,



Madeliene Abling, *EZ Breezy*, 2012

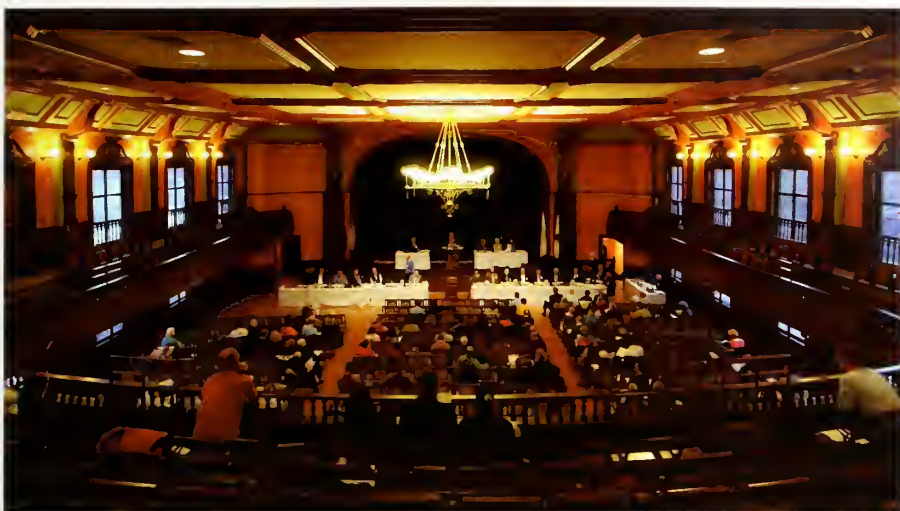


Irene Lipton, *Untitled (12-08)*, 2012



Etta Goodstein, *Sterling Silver Vest*, 1970






attract—becoming at one with the wearer in the very movements of the body. The first work she ever made, while living on a commune with musicians and dancers, was a loose-fitting “vest” made of links of silver hoops. She said, “I wore it all the time. Still fits.”

**Irene Lipton**, formerly of artSTRAND, has joined the Albert Merola Gallery. Her solo exhibition this summer, from July 20 to August 9, will be showing new work that pushes her dynamic, thoughtful abstraction forward. Lipton is also a recipient of PAAM's 2012 Lillian Orlowsky and William Freed Foundation Grant.

**Joey Mars** is the popular street artist who painted the facade of the relocated Shop Therapy, now housed in the cavernous space of a former bowling alley. Mars's designs are playfully subversive, toying with our fears of outlandish creatures with surreal exaggeration of eyes, teeth.



owner Ron Hazel in supporting Spank the Monkey Fine Arts.



**Kenneth Stubbs's** painting *Seaside Holiday* (1948) serves as the frontpiece in the catalogue for *The Tides of Provincetown: Pivotal Years in America's Oldest Continuous Art Colony (1899–2011)*, reviewed in this issue. The honor of this position exactly shows the pivotal, recurring conflicts between two schools of visual thought: those who maintained a connection with realism and those who freely embraced abstraction. Stubbs was a Cubist-inspired artist who was overshadowed when Abstract Expressionism triumphed, yet the originality in his paintings is his solution to portraying objects from multiple perspectives. If Picasso and Braque sometimes fragmented features to the point of illegibility, Stubbs found a way to make figures seem to be moving. In the monograph accompanying the Kenneth Stubbs retrospective last summer at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, the art historian Robert Metzger wrote: "Rather than choosing a single viewpoint, which rendered only a partial view of things, he juxtaposed different aspects of one object. His deep understanding of simultaneity succeeds in making inward ideas visible."



Kenneth Stubbs, *Seaside Holiday*, 1948  
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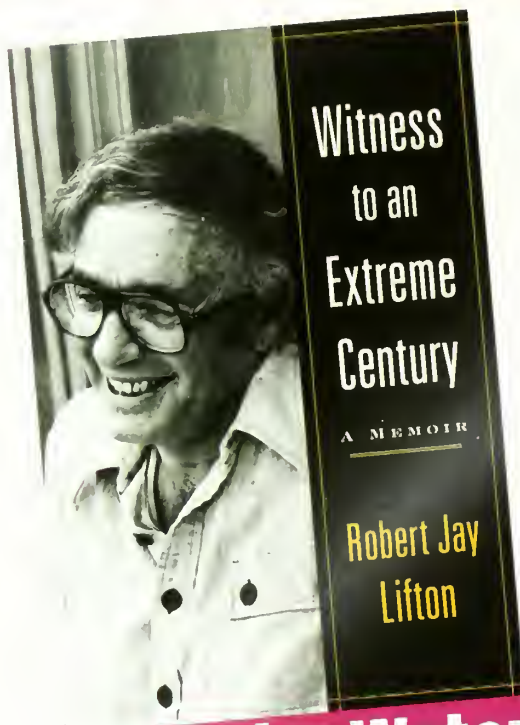
at the Belvedere Museum, featuring artists who use gold in their work, tracing the practice from the pre-Renaissance to the present. Organized in celebration of Gustav Klimt, Klimt's *The Kiss* is the centerpiece. Indeed, gold is also the shimmering metal in the paintings of our featured artist Selina Trieff. This summer, Vevers, formerly of DNA Gallery, has joined the Albert Merola Gallery.



Tabitha Vevers, *SHIVA (While We Dance)*, 2010



## WRITERS



**Robert Jay Lifton**, our cover feature in 2007, is author of *Witness to an Extreme Century: A Memoir*, a belated and amplified retooling of the major ideas that made him famous as one of the few “public intellectuals” remaining in America. *Witness* recalls his harrowing introduction into trauma via the Korean War, when Lifton was assigned work as an army psychiatrist, learning from the ground up what forms trauma might take: Chinese thought reform, post-combat stress of Vietnam veterans, and, in a shift from the victim’s point of view, the mind-twisting commitment to medical killing by the

Nazi doctors. At Hiroshima, “one bomb, one plane” made a whole city disappear, dooming survivors to a “death in life” intimacy with the ghastly effects of radiation.

Steven Pinker, Lifton’s colleague at Harvard and author of *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, collided with Lifton in a lively dialogue last March at the New School in New York. If Lifton argues that we must find ways to make our devils “less-er,” Pinker wants to celebrate the “better angels”

that Lincoln hoped would rise out of war. Pinker asks what conditions propel violence and what inhibits it. Historically, face-to-face killing by “interpersonal methods” has declined vastly. Warfare now, Lifton said, is being numbed by the push-button remoteness of killing; the killer no longer needs rage or anger to function. Pinker countered sharply that the use of drones aimed at high-value targets has in fact caused a decrease in mass deaths. Lifton summed up the allure of “numbing” in modern wars; a pilot told him, “When a robot dies, you don’t have to write a letter to his mother.”

**Jim Lucason** describes himself as an “an American-born Irish writer,” or rather an American who has searched out his Irish heritage much in the manner of Norman Mailer trying to understand the Irish-American aspect of the eloquent narrator of *The Deer Park* or that of President John F. Kennedy. Something transatlantic shines forth in Lucason’s recent novel *Time and Distance* (Beag Moinear Press, Ireland, 2011), in which a brokenhearted man from Massachusetts moves to Ireland to room upstairs in a pub that is in the hub of rural Kerry County. Mailer famously said he was more intelligent when he drank, and he further declared, “Short-term amnesia is not the worst affliction if you have an Irish flair for the sauce.” In the novel, the pub’s owner, a fount of Irish history and spinner of wisdom about the beauty of a difficult life, drinks on only two occasions: when he is alone or when he is with others. This May, Lucason’s play *The Rapparees* received Ireland’s Eamon Keane playwriting award, with the judge commending especially Lucason’s “effortless Irish and English simultaneously used but neither contrived or forced.” A character asks, “Beannacht De leat! [God’s blessing with you!] What news young fella?” Answer: “Well, there be bad news and there be worse news. What would you be preferring?”

**Mary Maxwell**’s new collection of poems, *Cultural Tourism*, contains a series of verbal portraits of Outer Cape residents past and present (such as Millay, Lazzell, Breuer, Mailer, Motherwell, Resika). “As in certain special European locales,” she writes of the area’s remarkable roster of artists and writers, “those who’ve committed themselves to a life of the imagination seem to have remained here as its perpetual inhabitants.” Trained in Classics at Columbia, Maxwell recently returned from Claremont McKenna College, where she gave a talk on Roman erotic elegy at the 2012 ALSCW conference. Given her view that art exists “outside of mortal time,” it’s no surprise that poems in *Cultural Tourism* address Catullus and Virgil as though they were contemporaries and actual contemporaries, such as performance artist John Kelly, as though they were already immortal. Mary served as Poetry Editor of *Provincetown Art’s* 2005 issue.

**Francine Koslow Miller**, art historian and author of *Cashing In on Culture: Betraying the Trust at the Rose Art Museum*, offers a first-hand account of Brandeis University trustees and their attempt to close down the school’s famed museum of contemporary art in order to close budget gaps in other areas of the university. This is a cautionary tale with international implications regarding trusts, deaccession, and the preservation of art collections.

**John Waters**’s early movies had to be shown in “art houses,” because carpeted theaters would not understand that, when people vomited, he was actually receiving a standing ovation. Shock humor allows an audience to laugh at what would horrify them if they didn’t know the scenes were invented, not real. Waters loves people who act out of uncontrollable impulse and empathizes with criminals, outcasts, outlaws. Growing up in Catholic schools, the Forbidden Books were his reading list. Naturally, he flourished in Provincetown, where he made many of his early movies. A new book, *John Waters: Interviews* (University Press of Mississippi, Conversations with Filmmakers Series), edited by James Egan, details the sustaining role of Provincetown in making movies on a shoestring. (If he had millions, he said, he would spend it on making fake trees.) Waters appeared on our cover in 1995, looking glamorous and insouciant at once in the photograph by Jack Pierson. The *Provincetown Arts* feature essay, written by *Boston Phoenix* film critic Gerald Peary, is reprinted in the new book, offering interviews with the many Provincetown people who were characters in the films, where they were directed to make beauty marks of their blemishes by exaggerating them, exposing what most people attempt to hide.

## John Waters INTERVIEWS

Edited by James Egan



## OFFSEASON



We are not on your vacation.

Nathan Butera, Brian Carlson, Braumwyn Jackett, Alexandra Foucard, Griff Griffith, Dian Hamilton, Gwen Kazloukas-Noyes, Bob Keary, Melissa Nussbaum-Freeman, Josy O'Neil, Judith Partelow, and Frank Vasello, with Thomas Acone, Andrew Clements, Rosanne Layton and Bragan Thomas



## FILM & THEATER

**Nathan Butera** is the photographer and filmmaker who produced for Provincetown television (Channel 17, [www.provincetowntv.org](http://www.provincetowntv.org)) nine episodes of *Offseason*, a series offering summer visitors a glimpse of what the town is like when most of the summer crowd vanishes. Featuring many locals as fictional characters and shooting scenes in the produce section of the local Stop & Shop, on fishing boats tied up at the wharf, in a yoga class at Mussel Beach, or in the cemetery to commemorate a ghastly murder, the *Twin Peaks*-like quirkiness of the characters is captured in close-ups of what their hands, faces, or feet are doing—an aesthetic that Butera fostered while earning an MFA in filmmaking from New York University. He realized that in theater, the performers needed to stretch their voices to reach the back row, while in film, one need not shout—a whisper, the movement of a tear finding a path down a face, or a close-up of a handclasp could work as well. In the tradition of trailblazing filmmaker John Waters, Butera is using local personalities as fictional characters. *Offseason* will air Sundays at eight.

**Jay Critchley**, a well-known conceptual and activist artist, is pictured here greeting swimmers about to be ferried to Long Point for the *Swim for Life & Paddler Flotilla*, Critchley's enduring performance piece. This September 8 is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the annual mile-and-a-half swim from the tip of the Cape to the Boatslip deck. The event has raised \$2.5 million for AIDS, women's health, and the community. For the first time, Swim25 KickOff Parties were held in New York and Boston in the spring. Local events include an exhibition and reading of the 2,500 Prayer Ribbons, a show of artists who have created designs over the twenty-five years, and a twenty-five-day count-down to the event. This year's T-shirt will be plucked from the *Swim* archives.



Jay Critchley, *Swim for Life*, 2011 PHOTO BY MIKE SYERS

other since Nick was a toddler. Nick showed the film to his real father, who watched it many times, especially liking the scene in which De Niro is in bed and shouting at Nick, "You are mine, I made you!" Nick said his father began to imitate De Niro's great voice—"sort of imitating De Niro imitating himself."

**John McDonagh**, the new director of the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum, has had a distinguished career directing nonprofit cultural organizations, including four years in Washington at the Smithsonian Institution serving as chief development director for the National Museum of American History, and four years as director of Plimoth Plantation in Plymouth, where the Pilgrims settled shortly after departing from Provincetown. At Plimoth Plantation, the living history of English and Native American cultures during the seventeenth century is evoked in historically accurate re-creations of the Pilgrim village and the Wampanoag home-site, showing the inhabitants busy with their daily lives. Highly trained interpreters assume historical personas, which have been heavily researched. Actors re-create thirteen dialects from the seventeenth century, remarkably evoking the real speech and mindset of the time and never breaking character. Contemporary Native Americans speak in modern English and wear deerskin clothing. Inside their dome-like dwellings, their beds are lined with thick bearskins.

McDonagh believes that objects can help to tell human stories and make them relevant to present-day lives. He is eager to develop exhibits at the Pilgrim Monument to celebrate the life of the native population present when the Pilgrims arrived. Over ninety thousand people visit each year; McDonagh invites use of the wide lawn at the foot of the Monument, overlooking the town, as a perfect place for a picnic.



Paul Dano as Nick Flynn and Robert De Niro as Jonathan Flynn in *Being Flynn*  
COURTESY FOCUS FEATURES, PHOTO BY DAVID LEE



Katrina Eugenia in *Blossom*

**Katrina Eugenia** is a photographer whose short film *Blossom*, part of her first solo exhibition in a New York gallery last December, is a brief and intensely dream-like sequence of scenes of male desire from a female point of view. Eugenia wrote and directed this three-minute film, starring herself and her boyfriend, John Buffalo Mailer, author of "Bleed," published in this issue, a story that is about love from a male perspective. In *Blossom*, Mailer plays a young man tossing and turning in his sleep, dreaming of a beautiful woman, with scenes played by Eugenia, showing her arranging photographs on a wall or bathing in a bubble bath, offering tantalizing glimpses of her body. The young man, yearning for his future, sleeps, dreaming of running in his quest across the dunes in blue jeans, no shirt, barefoot. The final scene is the meeting of the lovers kissing while wearing gas masks, purchased at Marine Specialties during a five-day visit last fall, when the movie was shot on a shoestring. Perhaps the film's brevity makes it keener than *Blue Velvet* in its understanding of the intoxicating power of love. [www.katrinaeugenia.com/film](http://www.katrinaeugenia.com/film)

**Nick Flynn**, featured on the cover of *Provincetown Arts* in 2006, following publication of his best-selling memoir *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*, now has a cameo part in his own life story in the recent movie *Being Flynn*, retitled to elude censorship. Robert De Niro plays Nick's father, Jonathan, powerfully evoking the tensions between a taxi-driving alcoholic—in prison for a period for writing big, bogus checks—and his son. The father's grandiosity sounds like the exaggeration of an actor (perhaps playing the part of a great writer down on his luck), when he asks for a room at a homeless shelter in Boston, where Nick, played by Paul Dano, happens to be working. They have not seen each



## DEPARTED FRIENDS

Mary Oliver's poem "The Journey" was read at a memorial ceremony for Harvey Dodd at Saint Mary of the Harbor church. Many there knew the words by heart. It is a piece that reflects the spirit of those who live in our town, and of those who are now gone, and we share a part of it here:

... the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do—  
determined to save  
the only life you could save.



PHOTO BY BERTA WALKER

### HARVEY DODD

(1933–2011)

Harvey was an extraordinary artist who treated Provincetown to his watercolors and Orbital Performance Art for over sixty years. The flag he's holding in this photograph was premiered as the suggested World Flag during his gallery-wide installation at the BWG in tribute to Peace in the New Millennium, Winter Solstice, 2000. The Flag represents Unity and Equality around the World.

— Berta Walker

### ARTHUR COHEN

(1928–2012)

As we go to press, we mourn the passing of our beloved friend, the artist Arthur Cohen. He told us in 1991: "My minimal palette of blues and grays in many shades and combinations is simply a process of accumulating feelings toward the object. A tiny speck of white will be the lighthouse at Long Point. Its tiny is suddenly central and large. This diminishment makes the tiny a metaphor for the enormous. It represents how small we are in relation to our vast subject." — CB



PHOTO BY RENATE PONSOLD

### BUDD HOPKINS

(1931–2011)

Budd Hopkins, a frequent contributor of firsthand accounts of art-world matters for *Provincetown Arts*, was one of the thirteen original members of Long Point Gallery, which is being celebrated this summer in a major exhibition at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. Hopkins was the younger generation's version of Robert Motherwell, protean in his talents as a painter and spokesperson. When Long Point formed, Hopkins was president for the first year. He told me, "I looked the most respectable. Tony Vevers took over the next year and remained president for life." Even while his career as a prominent second-generation Abstract Expressionist thrived, his second career as the "father of the alien-abduction movement" turned him into a best-selling author, discussing "evidence of absence" with such figures as Carl Sagan. I asked Hopkins how the other members of the gallery felt about his second career: "Varies. Everybody shares the idea that this is something they don't want to get too close to. Who would want it close? Something unwelcome enters your belief system. Yet people are personally curious. Motherwell is very skeptical. Giobbi and Judith have a strong personal interest. The departing of the spirit, at the time of death, is depicted in Giobbi's drawings of his uncle, passing away at the time of his drawing."

— CB



PHOTO BY LYNNE BURNS

### JACKSON LAMBERT

(1919–2011)

I met Jackson in 1981 when I moved to Provincetown. He quickly became a mentor, social partner, advisor (only if asked to do so), and my best friend. Reading his columns or watching him paint, I would often have to ask, "What does that sentence mean, or what is this painting about?" He would quietly chuckle and explain his concepts to me. He waited a long time to tell me he was asked those same questions by many, and my asking was not due to my lack of knowledge! A truly gentle man with a special brand of humor. On very rare occasions he might be critical of someone, and I think the harshest remark by him was "he (or she) just seems gray to me." Perhaps only another artist would use those words. Love our Jackson and think of him every day.

— Sue Caroline Ogden



PHOTO BY DANIEL KEARNEY

### COLENE PINDER

(1971–2012)

She drowned in the shallow water of a Canadian stream after being knocked unconscious in an accidental fall. Though she lived in Provincetown only in the summer, she gave her heart to the town, modeling for Sal Del Deo, welding for Jack Kearney, pulling weeds for Suzanne Sinaiko, and caring for other people more than she did for herself. Her intense spirit is alive with those who knew her.

— Bert Yarborough





PHOTO BY NORMA HOLT

## NANCY WEBB

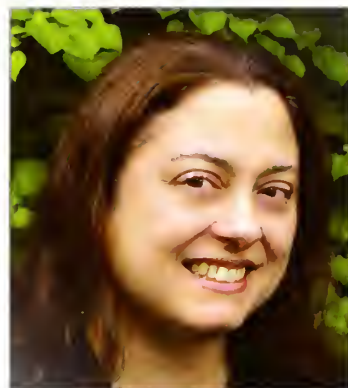
(1926-2012)

My mother, Nancy Webb, died peacefully at 5:13 p.m., May 22, in her home in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. She met my father, Bill Webb, in Provincetown in the summer of 1947 and they married that fall. The Provincetown Art Association and Museum was the first place she exhibited her art. She became the art director of Noonday Press, the firm where Dad was a partner. While there she designed book jackets for works by Isaac Bashevis Singer and Knut Hamsun, among many others. In the 1960s, she wrote and illustrated two children's books published by Prentiss Hall, *Aguk of Alaska* and *Makema of the Rain Forest*—the former to help me overcome my reading difficulties, the latter for my younger sister, Sophie. My mother learned to sculpt from Bernard Chaet and Philip Grausman in the midsixties, turning wax and clay models into bronze. Her drawings and sculptures were always about Eros and Thanatos in nature, represented in tide pools, dried flowers, crabs, helmets, skulls, and figures. She exhibited widely in New England and the Atlantic states and in 2006 had a retrospective at PAAM. As Bob Henry said, when presenting her with the lifetime achievement award from PAAM last year, "Nancy went her own way." In the end she left this world on her own terms: On the Cape in the home she loved, surrounded by her work and children. She is survived by her children, Alex, Sophie, and me, and her sister, Janet Chapin. We will miss her presence in our lives—she taught us what matters and how to be ourselves.

— Patrick Webb, May 2012

*There will be a memorial service at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum on September 9, 2012.*

## Letter from the Editor



I've always loved the Provincetown term "washashore," which is applied to people who've moved to the town later in life. It's as if they've been brought here inevitably by forces of nature, waves and tides. A new breed, attracted to a tiny artists' colony, a place of pilgrimage, beauty, tradition, and all kinds of freedom.

Perhaps this would also describe the figures in the work of artist Selina Trieff, one of our featured artists this year. Her pilgrims, dancers, clowns, and menagerie of animals all resonate with the beauty and gravitas of otherworldly beings, as well as Trieff's unique and subtle humor. They command our attention (are they watching us?), this unconventional royalty, gilded with real gold.

And as Trieff transforms familiar forms into the mysterious, our other featured artist, poet Robert Pinsky, brings the magic of poetry to a wide audience in projects such as the Favorite Poem Project, featuring poems chosen by people across America, and *POEMJAZZ*, in which he recites his poetry to a jazz accompaniment. Our poetry section, which features the work of sixteen poets, is dedicated this year to Pinsky's extraordinary work and influence, a tribute to his making the simplest of "sentence sounds" resonate as music.

Waves of all kinds drive our stories this year, transporting us to the jazz music of Carmen Cicero, the extraordinary artists in the *Tides of Provincetown* exhibition, the tidal-pool structures of artist Roy Staab, Mona Dukess's *Mapped Waters*, and John Buffalo Mailer's new short story, "Bleed," whose drama is enacted against the backdrop of P-town shores.

Our memorial section begins in early pages of this issue, but ultimately touches many stories, including excerpts from the journals of Bob Friedman, a friend and valued colleague, whose last two books, *Tripping* and *My Case Rests*, were published by Provincetown Arts Press. In reading the journals, one quote from 1977 stands out to me: "There is arrogance and vanity in the Egyptian assumption that life can be deified in monuments, yet no more than in my own desire to preserve life in words."

I can't help but think that, thirty years later, he might have added the caveat that life is celebrated and preserved not only in words but in people and relationships. We honor the memory of those who are gone by appreciating the enduring beauty of their work; we keep them alive in the precious memories of our friendships.

Waves roll in, then recede. The tides of Provincetown mark our days and years, and move on to other shores.

Susanna Ralli  
Editorial Director





COVER FEATURE

# Selina Trief

**"I'M ON A QUEST"**

By André van der Wende





*A necessary tool in the creative act, articulation is an aggressive, expressive act in defiance of death itself.*

— Anne Bogart, *And Then, You Act*

**T**HIS PAST WINTER, unfettered by increasing fragility, Selina Trieff remained active as always. When we first meet in early November, Trieff and her husband, the artist Robert Henry, have been preparing for a joint show at the local Wellfleet library. “I’ve always felt that whenever you’re invited to show, you show,” Trieff explains. “That’s my theory.” She also exhibited at the Addison Art Gallery in Orleans; was one half of a two-person show at the Cape Cod Museum of Art with her good friend, sculptor Del Filardi; and showed her work in two exhibitions at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, one of which featured her remarkable portrait of Quentin Crisp, the English raconteur and gay icon, a painting that reveals this artist’s interest in the assertive articulation of portraiture.

This summer a large cache of her work, recently pulled from storage in New York, will be on exhibit at the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown, marking the return of work not seen for years. *Transcending the Now: A Prophet Paints* is the exhibition’s incisive title, indicating the presentient nature of Trieff’s imagery. In her seventy-eighth year, Trieff continues to fire

volleys of productive activity despite her considerable physical disability. A recent rogue fall resulted in a broken ankle and six weeks of convalescence at Provincetown’s Seashore Point Wellness and Rehab Center. She took it in stride, bringing her drawing materials along and filling volumes of sketchbooks with her muscular drawings of heads. “I did a whole book after book of these strange drawings and that was fine,” she says with typically dry understatement.

The accident has necessitated a move from her spacious ground-floor studio, where she produced her large paintings, up to the smaller confines of the second floor. “I miss working big, really big,” she admits, referring to her large six-by-five-foot drawings and paintings, but concedes that the light up here is far superior—“just terrific.” So is the view, beyond the lumberyard onto the teeming petri dish of Wellfleet’s Duck Creek. One of her sketchbooks is propped open at the drawing table, where she sits in an armchair surrounded on both sides by an arsenal of black Sharpies. She has only recently returned to painting, able to stand at her easel with minimal assistance, her brushes and paints pulled in close for easy access.

An audience with Trieff is to bask in her sanguine presence while sharing in the benefits of her lifelong exploration of what makes a good painting. A direct line to art history, the inside of the large, white triple-decker house is like a trapezium museum of multiple rooms and hidden corners crammed



with paintings, framed drawings, sculpture, assemblages, photographs, and prints from an ever-increasing historical span of colleagues and friends. Here, the art is alive and meant to be lived with—shared as a vested living history that still buzzes with prodigious activity. Henry’s studio occupies the top floor, the patter of music and construction punctuating our conversation like an ambient murmur. Clearly, Trieff’s capacity is diminished, but she continues to draw and paint every day, hit the gym three times a week, and maintain an active teaching schedule of critiques and figure-drawing classes through PAAM. Now entering her seventh decade of artistic commitment, Trieff’s story continues to evolve and multiply. To know Selina is to know her unsullied warmth, grace, and good humor in the face of adversity, with a snappy and dry, topical wit that could only have come from being born and raised in Brooklyn.

Today Trieff’s art is most synonymous with her by-now classic signature style of slim-line androgyny: stylized figures with pale mask-like faces; silent, nameless clones or sentient beings draped in heavy robes or sheathed in leotards while consorting with a menagerie of domestic animals and death itself. When John Russell called Trieff “an American original” in the *New York Times*, he wasn’t resorting to a tidy cliché; he meant it with all the generosity



FACING PAGE: SELINA TRIEFF; CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *PILGRIM*, 2008, OIL ON CANVAS, 24 BY 24 INCHES; *QUENTIN CRISP*, 1981, OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 36 INCHES PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER DUFF; SELINA IN HER STUDIO WITH HER SKETCHBOOKS PHOTOS OF THE ARTIST BY PHIL SMITH





THE CARDINAL AND THE PIGS, 1987, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 BY 60 INCHES

that the label commands. You can spot a Selina Trieff painting immediately.

At times uncomfortable, with their punished bulbous noses and an unnervingly deep, direct gaze, Trieff's figures capitalize on the viewer's disquiet, poised, as they are, in a nether state of allure and

retreat. A distinctive and inherent push and pull in Trieff's paintings cause them to exist in a middle space that actively involves the viewer in a response that can be as aversive as it is compelling; one is uncertain how to regard them, unsure whether one has walked in intrusively or is being invited into an inner circle of protective embrace or cultish enslavement.

Much has been made of their androgynous nature, something that to Trieff "just happens, and that's fine." Her figures are not about gender per se, even if they ultimately appear more feminine than masculine. They are stoic, authoritarian, sometimes blank and bleak, but with a strident bearing such that the longer I engage and consort with her skeletons, cardinals, jokers, and clowns with their attendant animals,

the more involved I become, falling under their cool come-hither and restless melancholy. Soon, the viewer becomes inured to the familial pull of the figures, touching upon the need for one to accept unconditionally the strength of character required to maintain family and the self simultaneously.

We are not sure where we are or if we belong in Trieff's world—an alternate plane, an afterlife perhaps? Her figures are theatrical, minimally staged, often in pairs or small clusters of threes or fours, dressed in a timeless vaguely medieval costuming that trades in stock characters. Reprising the sixteenth-century *commedia dell'arte* of roving performers for the late twentieth century, Trieff acts out her own improvisations of figures consorting, conspiring, huddling, and embracing. The solitude of the figures, the heavy burden of mortality that pervades Trieff's classic work, is like a Technicolor still from *The Seventh Seal*. The startling apparition of Death in Ingmar Bergman's classic film must have had a profound impression upon the young Trieff when she first saw it at Amos Vogel's Cinema 16, so uncanny is the hooded mask-like resemblance of Death to Trieff's own incarnations.

Squaring off with mortality, Trieff makes friends with death, knowing full well we all face its inevitability. Without it, there is no life. Yet there's nothing morose in her acquaintance with death, its melancholy certainty, its pervasive current; instead, the mood sustains us with comforting strength. In *With a Yellow Skeleton* (1985), the skeleton in question seems almost happy, not with sinister intention, but as a presence to administer comfort, not fears, over the plateau of life. "A very dear friend of mine died a long time ago now," Trieff explains. "We were very close—if I ever had a sister, she would be that person—and I got involved with painting the skeleton as an honor to her. The idea of mortality got into a lot of my paintings."

Trieff was born to Jewish parents. Her mother was Polish; her father was a London-born dentist; yet when we touch upon religion, spirituality, and the influence of her ethnic background, she denies any overt connection to the faith she abandoned long ago: "There was a synagogue near where we lived in Brooklyn, and my father stopped going after his mother died. . . . My father decided 'It's not for me,' and I myself said, 'Well if he doesn't have to go, I don't have to go.'"



FAR LEFT: SELINA WITH GOAT  
PHOTO BY NORMA HOLT

LEFT: RED GOAT ON YELLOW,  
2001, OIL ON HYPRO,  
18 BY 24 INCHES



Does she consider herself an atheist? Pondering, she says, "Pretty much so. At best an agnostic." Nonetheless, Trieff's work is rooted in a quasi-religious spirituality, a personal, nondenominational exploration of the self. While Trieff herself appears resolutely secular, her paintings transcend her "real world" persona for a parallel, devoutly spiritual one with strong autobiographical and familial connections. She says she is able to reconcile this inherent contradiction between her public persona and her private spirituality: "There's a deeper quality of what being religious is." Her generous humanity squares with her passion for the transcendental power of the religious art of the early Renaissance.

Trieff finds release from the noble quest for spiritual transcendence in her wonderfully energetic, often hilarious, and moving portraits of animals; the yang to her yin, the silly to her serious. "That's why I decided to do all those chickens," she says, "because you could be absurd. I can do that with the animals, play around and have that kind of fun with a reclining pig, where I couldn't with a nude. It's the Charlie Chaplin in me. You know where you could go from this austere-looking person to the absurdity of what he does on screen."

A strong counterpoint to her figurative work, the animal paintings occurred after she and Henry established a long-standing summer residence on Martha's Vineyard. "I had been painting animals before on the Vineyard... we used to live near a farm and I used to go up there to draw from the animals. So I did the chickens and ducks, there were Canada geese, pigs—whatever they had, I drew. I loved that farm! I made a lot of charcoal drawings of animals," she says, adding that she would often bring back a fat prize of studies to be worked up in the studio.

She taps into the inherent humor of each animal: the long neck of the Canada goose, running ahead of everything else; the slight malevolence of the goats and sheep; the happily rotund heft of a prone pig, which she depicts with just a few fluid, assertive lines and a blackened face. Looking at a



WITH A YELLOW SKELETON, 1983, OIL ON CANVAS, 72 BY 72 INCHES

drawing of a llama, all profile and neck in near silhouette that neatly bisects the page, one can see how good Trieff is in using strong blacks in creating rich areas of dense lines that build into commanding forms. Much the same happens in her chicken drawings, which possess an explosive force of strutting, preening ridiculousness rendered with deep percussions of blackened, powdery charcoal.

Trieff likes the idea of the animals simply "because." They are "ridiculous," offering an absurdity that can still take us to surprising places. We may smile at the pigs, but we also marvel at their precision in form and their nobility; an inherent dignity and pathos that may catch you off guard. Some animals can be unexpectedly touching and are a particularly potent accompaniment when she pairs them with her figures. Suddenly, the context shifts and the animals are given equitable bearing and status: they are escorts, protectors, fellow travelers, and Greek chorus. The one painting that keeps me coming back for repeated viewings is *The Cardinal and the Pigs* (1982). The painting is a masterpiece, set in a beautiful pyramid composition with the cardinal seated in a full-length, blazing-red robe, tall and imperial with two pigs flanking his feet. In some cultures the pig is a symbol of virility and fertility; in others, sloth, greed, and ignorance. If this is a sly comment on the church, then Trieff is not giving it up. "Probably, but I don't know what it is," she says with typical obtuseness and that twinkle and teeniest of smirks. While the symbolism could be construed to offend, the whole juxtaposition is simply too intriguing and poetically ambiguous for such a negative interpretation, not to mention beautifully painted with a minimal tonal palette jolted by

the large swath of saturated red. "They always have these wonderful Renaissance paintings, royalty with their dogs," Trieff says, explaining why she simply traded the canine for the swine. Asked about her aversion to religion while directly referencing it, Trieff is unrepentant. "Absolutely, but the poses were so marvelous, 'Look at me I'm important!'" she says, pointing to the stuffed pomp of the cardinal. You can't look away; that's the point: even repugnance has a strange fascination.

You could talk of her figures existing on a spiritual plane, the animals on an earthly one, but Trieff will not give you a direct answer as to what that spirituality pertains to. She may offer a light shrug and a twinkle, but is more apt to say it's about locating her figures in a space that's grounded and credible. Hofmann students are always problem-solving, so her talk about painting often turns to the pragmatic, skimming over questions of content, and the iconography of the symbolic narrative she's engaged in. The small birds that populate her paintings "just suddenly appeared," Trieff says, but when I press her on it she denies any symbolic intent before catching herself: "Not really, no; but there are a lot of birds in religious paintings. Me, this nonbeliever, talking about religious art, it's a riot!" Birds in religious art, as Trieff knows, are symbols of the soul, the transcendent spirit that rises above the material body to immortality. In her work they exist as fragile silhouettes, transient souls in red and blue perched on an arm or shoulder or isolated in small tondos.

These machinations of the afterlife are taken further by pairing Louie, her late beloved dog, with her figures. Affectionately dismissed as "my crazy dog," this lovable mutt has found its way into a



ORANGE CHICKEN, 2004, OIL ON HYPRO, 24 BY 18 INCHES

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER DUFF, COURTESY BERTA WALKER GALLERY





TRIAD I, 1983, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 72 BY 60 INCHES

large number of paintings; sometimes solo, often in pairs, always placed in the front of the painting as a guardian and loyal guide. With his strong elongated features, prominent ears and long nose, he bears a resemblance—color notwithstanding—to Anubis, the Ancient Egyptian jackal-headed god associated with the dead. Anubis is a guardian of cemeteries who presides over mummification—and what is painting if not an act of preservation, and, in Trieff's case, embalming with gold leaf and living color?

Selina herself is like a freshly tapped bottle of champagne, uncorked in the face of her trials, famous for her sunshine disposition and eternal optimism; yet her paintings reflect a serious and studious painter of spiritual travelers staged within hermetic environments. Trieff's grounded nature seems at odds with her lofty and mystical connotations. "We all have those dualities," she says, "and duality is very much part of my work." Her paintings balance on a fulcrum of ambiguity, each painting a penultimate hush with its own uniquely reverent presence. Duality exists between the familiar and unknown, between the sacrosanct space of her figures and the riotous uproar of her animals, between the light and dark of life and death, while her mysterious androgynous figures waver between anima and animus.

It's this bilateral thrust that gives her work balance, presence, and power, but when she's in the sway of actually creating it, Trieff doesn't get saddled with theories of rhetorical confluence. For this most pragmatic of painters, she's simply trying to build a better painting, at least in her mind. All the other stuff—the symbolism; the spine-bending, one-act plays of quiet intensity; the silent soliloquies of sometimes uncomfortable intrusion that eschew this mortal plane for a lateral one of complex spiritual overtures—may be the sum result of intense emotion, but they can only occur along the road to structural integrity. As a former Hans Hofmann student, she must make it so.

"Talk to any ex-Hofmann student," says Trieff. "They are always still dealing with the same issues; not with the subject matter as much as how the painting resolves." Trieff began her studies in 1951 with Morris Kantor at the Art Students League in New York City. "He would talk about the abstraction and that everybody in the class was an abstract painter," even though they would be working directly from a model, she remembers. "The resolution of any painting was based on the abstraction and not the literary part of the painting." Four years later at Brooklyn College, it was teachers Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko who stressed the commitment to "the literary

part of the painting," and that you were not there to "paint pretty pictures."

"It was not frivolous. Rothko wanted to attend to what art was about. I had him first for an art history class of contemporary art, and we started with Rembrandt, which to me was absolutely astounding. His feeling was that Rembrandt was the first painter who ever ended up painting what he wanted to paint," Trieff recalls, referring to Rothko's notion that painting can act as a powerful conduit for self-expression. "Rothko had a studio that was not far from the Museum of Modern Art. It was above a factory that made glass and the floor was a glass floor. He would have his big paintings in this room with the light coming from the bottom; it looked like a place of religion."

Hofmann emphatically helped Trieff give her fledgling efforts structure, an abstract backbone derived by drawing directly from life. She began classes with him at his New York school in 1954, and the following two summers at his school in Provincetown: "The foundation of his teaching was through drawing, basically with charcoal. We always worked from the model and even if we got very abstract, which most of us did, the source was still figurative." Trieff draws as naturally as breathing, an essential function and the core to her ascetic aesthetic. Beneath the layers of gold leaf and radiant color, there is drawing. "Drawing has always been a kind of salvation," she says, explaining how it shows her the way out of any creative impasse she may be having on the canvas. "There's always something interesting happening for me in drawing that I can then pick up in paintings." Drawing is the fire that alloys the strength of her structures, and its vitality remains startlingly intact.

I remember confronting one of her massive six-by-five-foot charcoal drawings at PAAM several years ago, stunned by its direct power and convincing authority. Stripped of a golden palette, Trieff's figures occupied tangible space and alert presence that got right to the point. We see this quality in drawings such as *Triad* (1983) and the powerfully elegiac *The Greeting (Visitation)* (1984), which is based on Giotto's monumental *Visitation* from the Arena Chapel. This is an intense drawing of monolithic density, with heavily scribed charcoal laid down like some form of flagellation set against architectonic framing.

"I had such a good time with those big charcoals," she says, recalling that they were so large that fixing them became an issue. "I didn't want to choke to death in the studio, so I carried them down on a Sunday morning on Greenwich Street in Manhattan and sprayed them outside." It must have made for a sight, this parade of life-size skeletons, animals, jokers, and shadowy robed figures laid out on the sidewalk on a Sunday.

Hofmann stressed pictorial strength through drawing. Even under the duress of domesticity and raising two daughters, Trieff continued to draw



BOB AND ME, 1973, OIL ON CANVAS, 72 BY 72 INCHES





THREE DANCERS, 1996, OIL ON CANVAS, 72 BY 60 INCHES PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER DUFF

and paint, albeit in a diminished capacity. “I just made time,” she remembers. “I thought I’d go bananas if I weren’t working. I did a lot of drawings and paintings of the kids.” Throughout her career, she has never been willing to relinquish working from a life source, always driven to finding its accord in the dynamics of abstraction: “The subject matter becomes very particular, but all the resolutions to the paintings are based on abstraction.”

Trieff as a teacher is philosophically aligned with Hofmann. On a stormy fall day in early November, a small group of artists, work in hand, convened at Trieff’s house for the first of several critiques facilitated through PAAM. Surrounded by art on all sides—including a fabulously rudimentary James Lechay drawing of his wife, June, that soon entered the conversation—the gathering was a warm blend of technical talk, frank discussion, admiration for other art and artists, anecdotes, and equitable camaraderie that negated the bleak weather outside.

Trieff’s adherence to the praxis and questions of painting is littered with axioms she has gathered over the years and to which she still subscribes: “Once you translate the three-dimensional world into the two-dimensional, you’re immediately abstracting: Look at the forms in your drawing in a more abstract way. Look at the realism and look at the abstraction in the realism. There’s a great connection between the two.” Then she adds one of my favorites: “It’s very good not to control something.” On the question of under-painting versus over-painting, she recalls the counsel of her old friend Milton Avery: “It takes two people to make a painting: one to start a painting, one to take the brush away.”

When Berta Walker, then director of the Graham Modern Gallery in New York, extended an invitation to represent her work around 1985, Trieff came out of the dark hinterland of showing primarily at cooperative galleries. There’s always a sense of her being a perennial outsider, a status that only seems to have empowered her commitment to the figure. Never one to cleave to fashion or trends within the art world, if Trieff ever felt isolated as a figure painter, she never showed it. “I felt I was just using another aspect of what art was about,” she says. Perhaps working in an atmosphere of latent recognition

helped foster her own exclusivity: she was not alone as a figure painter, she was centered. Her first major gallery exhibition took place when she was fifty-two; by now, Trieff had not only matured as an artist, she was in full flight.

Looking for a fuller, broader picture of her achievement, I was curious about her work before she ever applied a sheet of gold leaf, which began at the cusp of the 1980s. Case in point is her portrait of Quentin Crisp, which I saw at PAAM, emerging like a hidden jewel from Trieff’s oeuvre and exposing her considerable talent as an adroit portrait painter.

Trieff recalls: “Crisp was just marvelous, incredible.” He sat for Trieff for four sessions, delighting the artist with his incessant verbosity, and sitting still long enough for her to capture his flamboyance in the curves of the wingback chair, the elegant line and succinct brushwork, and the turquoise embellishments of his ring and scarf. Standing in front of Trieff’s remarkable image was to know Crisp himself: the pursed poise of his regal stare, the supreme confidence and preternatural styling, a painting so precise—seemingly effortless and perfect in its delineation of line, form, and color—that it appears to finish itself.

Portraiture became a natural mode for Trieff’s coiled sensibility; she found herself doing large paintings of her children, family, and friends that referenced Velázquez’s paintings of the Spanish royal family and the infantas, pointing a way forward for Trieff by depicting her own family in strong postures that directly engage the viewer. It is significant that Trieff turned to the thing that was closest and most accessible to her: her family. “I did a couple of paintings, big ones. I remember one being of friends of mine and their family and even their dog; or I had paintings of me and Bob in very classical poses.”

The family portraits, such as *The Three of Us* (1974), *The Children and the Dog* (1974), and *Bob and Me* (1975), are among the best things she’s done: large, piercing images of her family, where poignant expression resides in the gesture of a curled hand, a furtive look, or an emblematic red. They already hold a forward, confrontational rigor that Trieff was later to refine. I love this period in Trieff’s work,



TWO FIGURES WITH GOAT, 1997, OIL ON CANVAS, 72 BY 62 INCHES PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER DUFF





TWO FIGURES WITH DOG, 1994, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 BY 60 INCHES

when the surfaces were thin and dry with a restrained minimal palette punctuated by bursts of primary color.

In the latter half of the 1970s, she produced a series of strong self-portraits in which she is wearing an array of hats. They're serious, taut paintings, crisply rendered with a subdued palette—until we get to 1979, and a painting of Trieff in a clown costume set against an open field of gold, one of several spin-offs she made based on Watteau's indelible painting *Pierrot called Gilles* (c. 1718–19). The most well-known of these paintings is a full-length, life-size *Self-Portrait* (1979–80), now in the collection of Michigan State University. This is a pivotal painting, in which Trieff shifts her focus from an everyday scene or costume, such as a hat, to the stage and an entire wardrobe of costume changes where she can fully inhabit a character at will—perhaps as a stand-in for Selina herself?

"I think in some ways they are," she says. "They were never consciously that, but I think they are. There was something about the Watteau and the clowns—it really affected me. So direct! It almost looked like he had to be

looking in the mirror. It was so touching, and I felt I looked like that person. In my head I did—I felt how that person looked."

It also broke down a door to a new world of painterly possibilities for using the figure as a means of self-expression by exploring multifarious states of being through a subliminal troupe of archetypal players: the pilgrim, the sad clown, the happy clown, the sage, the traveler, the transient soul, the healer, etc. It also placed her in the crosshairs of art history, quoting directly from a specific painting. But directly or indirectly, what remains remarkable about Trieff is that she's the summation of a variety of influences and sources, without looking remotely like any single one of them.

But it is perhaps the early Renaissance paintings that resonate deepest of all, exemplified by Trieff's love for Giotto. "I love Giotto. I think I am influenced by Giotto more than anybody else. I find that the Italian mystics, those paintings, affect me greatly. They're just great art. They have that spirituality, which I think all good paintings have. . . . I remember seeing the Giotto's in Padua when we first went to Italy. I find those paintings really





PILGRIM AND GREEN SKELETON, 1984, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 BY 36 INCHES

touching. They are so pure," she says. I mention Giotto's monumentality and Selina responds: "That's what connects me to those things, the shape and the forms—and I'm crazy about gold leaf!"

The gossamer thin sheets of gold leaf that Trieff uses are 22 carats of opulent beauty. "I think sometimes the gold leaf has helped because of the way it's used and how the gold really affects the figures. That becomes interesting again," she explains, referring to a recent painting on which she laid down some gold leaf to shift the figure/ground relationship and bring the painting back around, enlivening and opening it up to new possibilities, potentialities. "It's how to deal with the space, the negative space on the paintings, and it was a good way to do it. I remember mentioning that if I was Velázquez, I could paint the gold; but I'm not Velázquez so I use the real thing."

It may sound casual and dismissive for Trieff to talk about the leaf as merely a practical way to rally space, albeit a pretty nice space, but, of course, it has links to Medieval and Renaissance art, and her eternal Velázquez and his beloved *infantas*, their seduction and preposterous beguilement further enhanced with gold strafed like nectar to draw you into their spell. When Trieff applies the gold, it draws you in, but it also becomes a sacrament, a benediction for enshrining a sacred, holy space that exists for Trieff's own magnanimous reverence.

From a purely painting point of view, Trieff's monumental canvases are full of thrilling passages: broad arcs of gold; rich fields of yellow, emerald, and sweet pink; and oceans of blue ready for you to fall into. The color is deep and saturated with a majestic contour line that won't quit, all expression dispersed through minimal body gestures, bony hands, and pallid pensive features. The noses, she explains, are a highly exaggerated family trait, as are the almond eyes, alien and piercing, or prosaic, as dark and penetrating as they can be detached and inward—depending on Trieff's discretion. "To me the eyes are so crucial and I guess my whole family has eyes like that," she says. She mimics the elfin ears in the leaves of trees on either side of the painting to help anchor her figures within a tenable space of complex simplicity, but with enough modality to step off the canvas. And like the best of her work, the line is exquisite. Vitality courses through a Selina

Trieff via its line: sometimes stacked three across in alternating strands of color, they not only describe the density and position of her forms with succinct economy, they masterfully ignite the figures' postures into action with a palpable life force flowing through their veins. Don't be fooled by their passive stance—they're alive and electric, expressing so much through posture and placement. For such still paintings, they are constantly pulsating.

Looking collectively at the work of the last few years, the paintings appear more minimal, with greater abstraction up front. Trieff has added silhouette and left out details so that the eyes must resolve their complexity elsewhere. More drips are allowed to stand, coalesce, and pool into indeterminate forms that she scribes with her broad arching line, enshrining her figures with aura. They maintain their graceful solidity, but they're also open, impermanent, the color more sobering, somber perhaps. She agrees her work is starting to "mellow out," an emptying out that can still capture the conviction of an anatomical cant, revealing truthful conviction through the most minimal of means: "I'm feeling better about my drawing, that I don't have to get into too much detail."

Hofmann's students, Trieff says, would ask him, "What is the secret?" He would answer, "Whatever the secret is, it's my secret. You have to find your own." For Trieff, it is discovering a personal truth: "That's what the goal is, to find your own secret, your own truth. I've found it for me." Together, we look at *Pilgrim and Green Skeleton* (1984). "I really have always liked that painting a lot, another cheerful little painting! Bob and I took a trip to Spain, and saw the

Spanish pilgrims . . . people on the silk route with those hats, young hitchhikers wearing those hats," she reflects, pointing to the distinctive wide brim of the hat that adorns and protects her pilgrims. I ask her who the pilgrim figure is: "Probably me," she replies. "I'm on a quest." 🐐

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GREEN GOAT, 1985, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 BY 60 INCHES PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER DUFF



# Selina Trieff

## A HUSBAND'S VIEW

By Robert Henry

**T**HE FIRST TIME that I met Selina Trieff was in 1953 in Walter Rosenblum's Photography I class at Brooklyn College: she had dark eyes, dark eyebrows, long black hair, starched light-colored blouse under a half-open buttoned-down sweater, woolen skirt, maybe bobby sox, Mary Janes on her feet. She was cute, she was neat, she was friendly, she was an artist. We became friends.

We both came from middle-class backgrounds. Selina was still living at home. Her family, although progressive in politics, were, typically for the time, insensitive at best, intolerant at worst, to women's aspirations and independence. Little did I know that this neat, demure coed, who had actually been a "booster" for a high-school team, would turn out, after quite a struggle with her own background and the prevailing ethos of the time, to become that exemplar of the strong-willed woman that Selina is.

Walter Rosenblum was an advocate of the "decisive moment" school of photography. Selina's camera, a bulky four-by-five-inch Graflex that she had inherited from her father, a dentist who would rather have been a photographer, was clearly unsuitable for this mode of photographing. It was pretty difficult to be unobtrusive with this monster of a camera—you had to look down into it through a vertical, fur-lined pyramid of an eyepiece. But Selina characteristically accepted the situation as it was and soldiered through. She probably got an A in the course.

In the art department, then called the design department, she was, of course, a star. It was clear even then that she was special. In fact, she had a big head start on most of us. Selina, although she lived outside of the local district, had finessed her way into Abraham Lincoln High School, noted for its exceptional art department. It was student-friendly and exciting for young wannabe artists. With Leon Friend as chairman and principal teacher, the department had turned out many artists who went on to careers in commercial art primarily. The founders of the very successful advertising agency Push Pin Studios are examples of alumni.

While in high school, she applied for and received a scholarship to the Art Students League. Her first teacher there was Howard Trafton. Trafton was a favorite at the League, but again, as at Lincoln High School, the teaching tended to train students for commercial art. Trafton had "methods." First you did A and then you followed with B, and Trafton, always accompanied by his wife, Willa, would go around the class tutoring students in his Method. This was great for some of the students, but not for Selina, who knew even then that she had to have

a more authentic and personal expression for her work. When she decided to add another class to her schedule, one taught by Morris Kantor, Willa Trafton got wind of this and Selina was summarily barred from Howard Trafton's class. Undeterred, Selina signed up for a class with Julian Levy and later took a summer class with Charles Alston in addition to Kantor's.

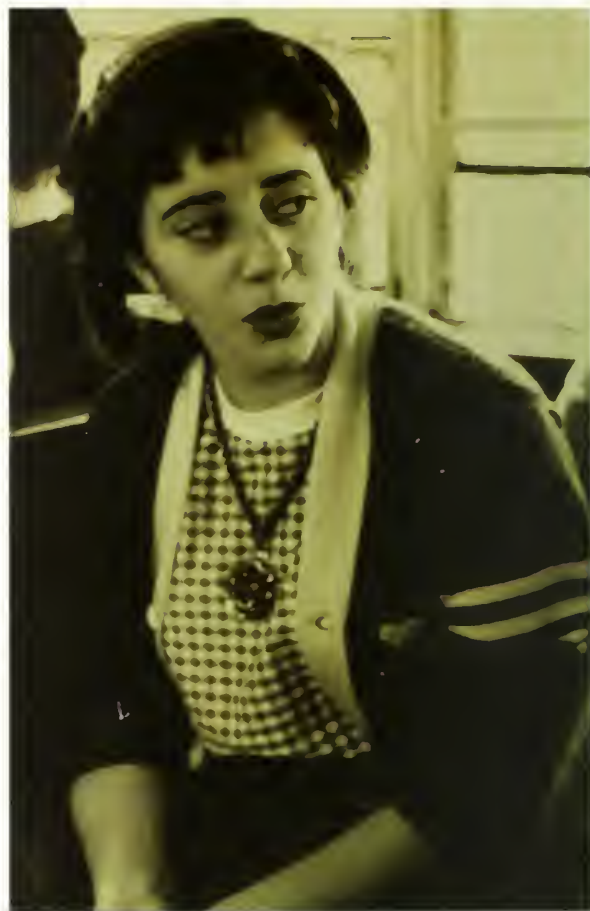
I recently moved several hundred paintings from storage in one of those old mills in Fall River to a new storage space in Truro. We had not looked at them for over twenty years. Included in this group were several paintings that Selina had done in Kantor's class. They are very much of the 1950s, but also solid, expressive, and spirited—quite an accomplishment for a teenage artist just becoming acquainted with the avant-garde art of the day. At Brooklyn College, Selina and I were two of the few students in the art (then called the design) department who were really intending to live a life working in art; and Selina certainly has done that. She often says that without drawing and painting she would probably curl up and die, and that is almost certainly true. In those days many, if not most, of the students were either biding their time until marriage, or studying to become art teachers. It is really amazing that in this environment such artists as Ad Reinhardt, Burgoyne Diller, Mark Rothko, Kurt Seligmann, Ilya Bolotowsky, Jimmy Ernst, and others of the first rank were actually there teaching.

Selina took a color class with Mark Rothko. Who could want anything more? I didn't take that class, as I had received some transfer credits for the work I had already done at the Hofmann School, but I do remember visiting the class, and Rothko talking about color needing to be "concrete." Selina says that Rothko inspired her by talking about how vital was the life, and consequential the work, of the artist.

We both took a figure-drawing class with Ad Reinhardt. There were two projects for the semester. One was drawing from the ubiquitous plaster cast of a flayed male figure with arm

extended. The other was to do a self-portrait. We were told to do them as accurately and with as much detail as possible. The class was held once a week for four hours in the afternoon, from 2 to 6 p.m., with a coffee break at 4 o'clock. With Reinhardt, this "coffee break" was the place where the real teaching was done. Like the other wonderful teachers I've studied with, he treated his students with respect, as fellow artists—inexperienced perhaps, but not inferior. Reinhardt would try out his ideas on us, and when Selina and I accompanied him to the now-famous Artists' Club, or Eighth Street Club, a great gift to us, we recognized those same ideas that he had tested on us.

The Eighth Street Club, founded by a group of New York School artists in 1949, was a combination of a social club and forum. It lasted until 1955. In the years that we attended, 1952–1955, there was a presentation each week by an artist or an art critic. The presenters were often the major



TOP: SELINA TRIEFF IN THE MIDFIFTIES; ABOVE: JUST MARRIED, 1955



figures of the day. Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Thomas B. Hess, and Harold Rosenberg are some that I remember. Sometimes there were panel discussions. The questions (more often statements) from the audience were usually contentious, in the style of the day.

Hans Hofmann, whose schools in New York and Provincetown from 1934 to 1958 were a major focus in the development of Abstract Expressionism in the United States, did not regularly participate in Club activities. I had studied with Hofmann before I went to Brooklyn in 1953, and continued in the night school while I was there. Eventually, Selina became interested in Hofmann and started attending the school as well.

As is well known, the principle activity at the Hofmann School was drawing in charcoal from the model, learning in this way to draw structurally, and perhaps abstractly, directly from observation of reality. Selina and I kept many of the drawings from the class and stored them in the same portfolio together for forty years or so. When we finally looked at them, we often found it hard to tell which one of us did the drawings! The amazing thing about Hofmann's teaching is that, although the work in the class looked so similar from student to student, the mature work of many of the artists who went through this process is original.

I asked Selina about Hofmann's teaching and how his approach differed from that of her previous teachers. The first thing she had to say about Hofmann was that he had a "method." Trafton had a method too and Selina hadn't cared for that; the system didn't allow for individual interpretation. It was, perhaps, too systematic. But Hofmann's method did appeal to her. The difference, she said, was that Hofmann gave you criteria for making changes in the painting. She had liked Kantor, he made good suggestions in his critiques, but he did not convey a systematic theory of composition. The work that she did under Kantor's tutelage has a "decorative" feel to it.

Which is not to say that there's anything wrong with a decorative element. Selina and I have talked about decoration, and we agree that "mere" decoration can be a problem; but we also feel that there is a decorative aspect to the work of some great painters. There is certainly a strong decorative component in her work. The inclusion of gold leaf is certainly a decorative ploy. But in her work, the decorative aspect supports a powerful and personal drama.

Hofmann, Selina says, "taught her how to fill up the picture space." Looking at her paintings, especially the ones with standing full figures, one can see that there are painterly areas in the faces, hands, and costumes, surrounded by, or more accurately supported by, larger areas of essentially flat color. Some of the magic in her painting comes from her ability to integrate the two so successfully.

The figurative parts are rendered in some sort of flattened volumetric way. These are juxtaposed with the geometric parts, often circles or segments of circles. Bodies and clothing are made of a combination of geometric and calligraphic shapes. It's interesting to see how she developed the shape that I would call "olive leaf" from the representation of

the leaf into a decorative element that fills the nonfigurative space, even becoming part of the ornamented fabric or even repeated as the eyes of a person or a pig.

One can spend a long time just looking at the hands in her paintings. Many artists, notoriously, have trouble doing hands—not Selina. Not only does she render them, she makes them a key part of the painting. Just as you seem to be able to tell what her figures are thinking and feeling by looking at their faces, so too can you tell from their hands. Of course, the way they touch each other is important, but so too is the tension, relaxation, or limpness of the hand.

Selina has adapted in recent years to the difficulties of not being able to hold small things securely, or to move her arms with ease, or to keep her balance and equilibrium. Just as she adapted to the Graflex camera years ago, she has adapted to this. The paint handling has become looser, as she always wanted; the hands in her figures have become more decorative as well as expressive. To me, they have become a decorative element akin to a tree or a sheath of grass.

Selina denies that her paintings have a religious component. "I come from a different background," she says. There is little doubt, however, that she has been influenced by some masters of Christian art. She reveres Fra Angelico and attributes his power to his true belief. There are figures in her work that seem to be inspired by Duccio (we did spend a few months living just outside of Siena in 1972), but this would seem to be more about art style than religious inclination. The connection to Gothic and early Renaissance painting is there as well, but for me it is in the depiction of the ordinary people—the observers, not the performers of the miracles—that one finds the essence of Selina's work. As in Gothic painting, in Selina's work each person is a portrait of an individual. The work is more democratic than it is hieratic.

One question about Selina's work that is frequently asked by viewers is about the noses on her figures. And Selina has an effective way of dodging questions that she doesn't want to answer. Her standard answer to this question has been, "They are members of my family." But I know her family, her extended family in fact, and they don't have that nose.

So what is it all about? Buffoonery? Selina likes to play the clown. She can be very funny, very much like Gracie Allen (if you remember her)—she doesn't censor herself. The first thing that comes into her head will come directly out of her mouth, whether it be pertinent or not, and people find amusement in this. We can see Selina as a clown, literally, in her wonderful painting *Gilles*, where she represents herself as the clown from the Watteau painting. Her favorite movie character is a clown, the Giulietta Masina character in *La Strada*.

Selina is known for her iconic images of women, and she has been harvesting this field for more than sixty years. I remember visiting her aunt some years ago, and there on the wall was a little painting of



ROBERT HENRY AND SELINA TRIEFF AT THE STABLE GALLERY, NYC, c.1955 PHOTO BY ROBERT FRANK

a young girl that Selina had done as a kid, and it was essentially the same sort of image, a somewhat stylized self-portrait against a spare background, although in this instance it was a picture of a young girl, done with a young girl's insights.

She has drawn and painted portraits of women, girls, and animals over and over again. Nowadays, she sits in her studio filling book after book with drawings done with Sharpie markers. Selina always describes herself as an abstract artist, and in a way she is. She creates the shapes in her work from the interaction of the figurative and the nonfigurative elements of the drawing. And this helps to explain how she can keep working with essentially the same



ROBERT HENRY AND SELINA TRIEFF, 1991, NYC PHOTO BY TINA DICKEY



**T**HE FIRST TIME I visited Selina Trieff's studio, twenty-eight years ago, and saw her figures in their "otherworldly" environment, I loved them. They made me feel like "I know!" But what was it that I knew? And what is it that the figures know? That "knowing" continues to be communicated to her audience, always creating a strong response—calm, meditative, confrontational, funny. And it changes day to day. What might have felt confrontational in Selina in years past, today seems to have arrived at some answer. Her message remains remarkably consistent, remarkably timeless. Aldous Huxley described this response as a "perennial philosophy," the timeless wisdom that has been rediscovered again and again through the ages.

Selina's paint is totally captivating. There is a sureness of the Abstract Expressionist, originally awakened by her teachers, Rothko, Hofmann, and Reinhardt, and taken to newer depths in each painting. It is tactile and emotional, often igniting a physical response. Her myriad colors, textures, and materials (actual gold leaf!) are used differently, and stimulatingly, in any given area she's working on, be it a dog's paw, the rump of goat, the drapery of a robe. We are enveloped by the lushness of paint used to express the illusive yet familiar landscape in which these people and animals reside.

At any point, in connecting to a glance in the eye of one of Selina's animals or people, we are stimulated in that moment to imagine, feel, question, contemplate. These pilgrims, dancers, goats, birds, sheepdogs seem to stir the universal questions of life: Who am I? Who are we? What is our place on earth? Aren't we all connected? Most of the figures are represented in twos and threes, revealing perhaps our own masks: Do I feel sad or mystified in this moment? Which mask am I wearing right now? The figures themselves, at first glance, may appear androgynous; at another time, one of these figures might seem to be male or female. They somehow reflect a duality of gender in each one of us.

I believe now that Selina's paintings actually embody a "spirit of guidance" with which the viewer connects. And that guidance actually changes from viewing to viewing, from day to day. I continue to think about all this since those early days, so many years ago, when I met my first Trieff face-to-face. Selina's paintings stimulate my spirit and body through sensuous paint and strong spirit. Her paintings offer me life-giving access to my inner truth in a continuously new way—mirrored, somehow, by these beings of light and wisdom. Selina's art is crafted by a great and unique talent, a most amazing artist and person.

— Berta Walker

image. But along with this compositional invention, Selina creates a living, breathing, thinking, feeling person in each work. They are all alive. Each is an individual. More and more, as time goes on, we feel their pain. I think of Selina as the Frida Kahlo of American painting.

UP UNTIL NOW, I've described the Trieffs we all know well; but there are other types of paintings—still lifes, portraits, and landscapes—that Selina did earlier in her life. Her still lifes were gestural, painterly, loosely painted. But her portraits showed exquisite control. Selina is a great portrait painter. Like so many other artists, she started to do portraits with self-portraits, and then family portraits, first herself, then her daughters, Sarah and Jane, and me as well.

All of Selina's work is personal. Adele Chiavetta, Selina's best friend, died, while still young, of cancer. Selina's large charcoal drawing of a woman, representing the artist, with a skeleton, who stands in for Adele, is a sort of portrait of, and memorial to, Adele. It is a key work in her oeuvre, combining, as it does, the observed with the imagined, the worldly and otherworldly put together.

Selina's first commissioned portrait was one of our friend Bugs Baer Jr., husband of Joan, whom we first met in Provincetown when she was married to Budd Hopkins. Bugs is painted sympathetically, with a sense of dignity, but the work is also psychologically complex, with the depth that characterizes a Trieff painting.

Most of Selina's portraits that are not of the family are of friends and fellow artists. One was of Bob Beauchamp, Nadine Valenti, and their dog, Turku. Selina also did portraits of Alan and Audrey Code and their daughter Andrea, Brenda Horowitz, Irving Kriesberg, and quite a few others. A portrait that she did of Mary Petruska won an award at an annual show at the National Academy of Art. She was commissioned to do a portrait of Quentin

Crisp when he was touring as the "Naked Civil Servant." There were four sittings, as I remember it, and Quentin entertained us with anecdotes as he posed.

There was also a time when Selina painted landscapes. This was mostly on Martha's Vineyard, where we spent summers for thirty years, until we bought our house in Wellfleet in 1995. Some of these were done when Selina went on painting excursions with a group of friends, Ruth Kirchmeier and Sally Brody, in particular. Her landscapes bear her distinct mark, and she probably could have made a career as a landscape painter; but a deeper force was driving her and she eventually decided to give up landscape painting.

Berta Walker has been an important supporter and promoter of Selina's art through all of its transitions. Selina had had numerous shows at various co-op galleries, but in the early days she was not about to push herself to get into a commercial gallery. She had, after all, rejected commercial art while she was still in high school. But in 1985 she decided that she wanted to have her work shown in a commercial gallery. She went to a number of galleries, including the Graham Modern, where Berta Walker was the director at the time. And Berta saw and liked Selina's work and talked about a studio visit, telling Selina to call her in a couple of months to set up a date. Selina did and was told, "not now," and "call me again in the spring." Selina did. Same result, "call me again in . . ." Selina did, again and again. I would certainly have given up long before, but not Selina—once she has an opening there is no closing. And eventually Berta did come for the visit, and Selina did begin showing at Graham Modern. There was even one time when a show of Selina's at Graham was reviewed twice on the same day by two different reviewers at the *New York Times*, a rare if not unique event. Berta has continued, after all these years, to be Selina's prime supporter and good friend.

When we were young and living in New York with two young daughters, I was painting and teaching at Brooklyn College and Selina was primarily responsible for the house and kids. Still, she never stopped painting. She would paint when the kids took naps; she would paint after they were asleep at night. She was, and still is, driven to paint. The worst offense to her is when someone asks, as innocent people often do, "Are you still painting?" "Yes, of course I'm still painting. I'm still breathing aren't I?" might be the answer.

I have previously noted Selina's comic skills. She would rather tell a good story than a factual one. When she delivers a slide lecture, she often has the audience laughing hysterically. She has a quick smile and quick wit, and she would never knowingly offend anybody. She loves helping people—in fact, she is helpful to a fault. She loves to give advice and to offer explanations for any event, find the cause for any effect, whether she has any expertise on the topic or not. She's a wonderful teacher, as the many artists on the Cape who have studied with her in the past, and are studying with her now, will testify. Some admire her strong will, her pluck—she's an inspiration to many. That little sprite of a woman has a will of iron. In her own sweet way, she is not to be denied.

How could I have known, callow youth that I was, that the sweet young thing that I first met at age twenty at Brooklyn College would turn into the indomitable woman who is with us today? But life alters us in unpredictable ways. We have been together for almost sixty years. I have had the privilege of being associated with a remarkable woman and the good fortune to share in, and be witness to, the creation of a lifetime of remarkable works of art. 🐾

ROBERT HENRY is an artist and occasional writer and curator. He lives in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, with his wife, Selina Trieff, and is Professor Emeritus at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York.



# She Was There and I Was Late—

THINKING ABOUT SELINA TRIEFF By Michael Klein

**FIRST LAID EYES** on Selina Trieff in the Stanley Kunitz Common Room (oh Stanley, oh Common, oh oxymoron of oxymorons) for an evening we shared (she showed slides, I read poems) some summer night long ago. It feels like long ago, but it probably wasn't that far back because there is some strange phenomenon that occurs whenever I meet someone I feel I have known my whole life—a *remembering* of sorts, with a kind of fondness, rather than the blind wonder that happens when something is new. That's how it was meeting Selina. She was always there, I had just gotten there late.

On that night, I didn't even know what her paintings were like because I had yet to see them like this—so many at once—presented as a time line through someone's life (though I have to admit, I had always been drawn—at least peripherally, driving past—to the two or three usually huge canvases that would fill a front window every summer at Berta Walker's gallery on Bradford Street). All I really knew that night was that here was someone so funny and so up front and yet, physically, quite frail that it felt as though we were meeting at the contrast between her body and her soul. And I felt as though I'd met a sister.

And then the lights went off.

And then I saw the paintings.

What's remarkable about Selina's work is how perfectly the paintings really are. Nothing is really moving, nor do the subjects of her paintings feel as though they *ever* moved. They are, in a way—and sometimes literally—living in the seal between the living and the dead. There's an almost imagined proscenium when you look into a Trieff painting—and that is its great reward. Those strange, compellingly long bodies that inhabit some of the paintings look as though they only live *there* in *that* world. There's nobody like that where I live, unless I look very hard for them. And so, ecstatically (for there is a kind of ecstasy here too), they're *Selina's* people. There's something very old and wise about her paintings, her use of color, and her subject matter: goats and other creatures, women who, at times, look like the artist herself at various stages (in her own past or as a visage of death or, most spiritually and in some far-fetched imagining, as an animal).

And there's gold leaf there.

Who uses gold like that on a canvas?

Then, of course, there's Selina herself, in the kitchen next to her studio in Wellfleet, where she lives year-round after years of living on Washington Street, New York City, in the building she bought years ago at the beginning of that storied time in Greenwich Village when artists began to inhabit the same lofts they made their work in. Whenever I go to visit her and her painter husband, Robert Henry, we start in the kitchen and usually end up

in the studio, where all the work is. But in that kitchen there's a wonderful collection of other people's work—paintings and photographs by her friends. She likes to trade art so that she's always surrounded by other people. She's humble.

And funny. Once, in New York, she told us a story about the silk-screen pig on a dark-green background that we had just bought from her in New York. An orthodox Jew who wanted to see her work saw the pig and said: "How can you paint these things, they're such dirty animals." Selina replied: "Well, I'm not going to eat it!" Then we asked her: "Do you eat pork?" Selina: "Of course I do, but I wasn't going to tell her that."

The artists who, even in their later years, simply never stop working are rare indeed, for they never seem to be the kinds of people who ever really had careers. They just live into what they become and, most of the time, become even more lovable than back at their beginning, when they started having ideas. Selina, of course, is one of those artists and one of a kind. She has never stopped, even when her physical health and well-being have tried to tell her otherwise. She is a great and abiding spiritual force in my life, and I am so grateful and happy for her friendship and for her work. ♪



ABOVE: SELINA TRIEFF IN HER STUDIO; BELOW: VIEW OF THE STUDIO PHOTOS BY PHIL SMITH

MICHAEL KLEIN's latest book of poems, then, we were still living, was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award, and his next book of poems, *The Talking Day*, will be published by Sibling Rivalry Press in 2013. A chapbook of his short lyrical essays, *States of Independence*, won the BLOOM Chapbook Prize in nonfiction judged by Rigoberto González and will be published in September. He teaches writing in the low-residency MFA Program at Goddard College in Vermont.





## NEW EXHIBITIONS

**ROBERT MOTHERWELL** BESIDE THE SEA

JULY 20–AUGUST 30, 2012 • CURATED BY LISE MOTHERWELL AND DANIEL RANALLI

**LONG POINT** AN ARTISTS' PLACE

JULY 13–SEPTEMBER 2, 2012 • CURATED BY MARY E. ABELL, PH.D.

INTRODUCTION BY CHRISTOPHER BUSA



ROBERT MOTHERWELL IN COLLABORATION WITH WILLIAM BAZIOTES, *UNTITLED*, 1942, INK ON PAPER, 8.5 BY 11 INCHES  
COLLECTION OF ALCYIA HIJELM © OEGALUS FOUNDATION, LICENSED BY VAGA, NEW YORK

**T**his summer the Provincetown Art Association and Museum presents two major exhibitions of enormous historical interconnection. *Robert Motherwell: Beside the Sea* details the “automatist” process the artist employed to represent the force of waves crashing against his bayfront bulkhead. The second exhibition, *Long Point: An Artists' Place*, offers selections of work by the thirteen original members of the cooperative (Varujan Boghosian, Fritz Bultman, Carmen Cicero, Sideo Fromboluti, Edward Giobbi, Budd Hopkins, Leo Manso, Robert Motherwell, Paul Resika, Judith Rothschild, Sidney Simon, Nora Speyer, Tony Vevers), work by belated members (Robert Beauchamp, Paul Bowen, Gil Franklin, Dimitri Hadzi, Michael Mazur, Renate Ponsold), and refers to the wider community that Long Point supported in its spirit of recognizing talent outside their gallery (for example, Stanley Kunitz, Arthur Berger, James Lechay, Chaim Gross, the Fine Arts Work Center).

In 1988 Motherwell, a profound influence on the primacy of the artist's voice in this magazine, was on the cover of *Provincetown Arts*, looking as vigorous as a sea captain scanning the horizon. In 1991, Motherwell appeared again in the

company of his Long Point colleagues, saying in quotes on the cover, “What better way to spend one's life than to have, as one's primary task, the insistence on integrity of feeling? No wonder others are fascinated by artists.” Motherwell was “one of the boys,” but these were all seasoned artists, not young artists starting a co-op. They had learned how to respect each other with as little ideology as possible, “out of good manners,” Resika said. The life and work of each artist mentioned in the previous paragraph have been explored, over the years, in the pages of *Provincetown Arts*.

In the early forties, shortly after arriving in New York, a young, boyish-looking Robert Motherwell was sought out by Roberto Matta as a kind of “interpreter of American civilization” for the émigré Surrealists, such as Matta, who had fled to New York from Paris as the Germans invaded the city. Matta was an international star, charismatic, conspicuously talented, and prone, like many Surrealists, such as the literary André Breton, to function within an art “movement” surrounded by his peers, staging extravagant exhibitions, starting little magazines, and writing manifestos.

Motherwell had studied philosophy in graduate school and he knew how to think metaphysically. He was precisely suited to define his own understanding of the meaning of





BESIDE THE SEA NO. 22, 1962, OIL ON STRATHMORE PAPER, 29 BY 23 INCHES, COURTESY OF BERNARD JACOBSON GALLERY

## Robert Motherwell

### *Beside the Sea*

In the summer of 1962, Robert Motherwell completed *Beside the Sea*, a series of more than thirty modest-sized paintings on paper, in a prolonged burst of inspired energy. He started the series shortly after he and his family—his wife, the artist Helen Frankenthaler, and his two daughters from a previous marriage, Jeannie and Lise—moved into *Sea Barn*, a three-story house and studio in Provincetown, MA. Although he had been spending summers in Provincetown regularly since 1953, having first gone there in the early 1940s, the works in *Beside the Sea* were made in response to a very new and specific experience he had of nature from the studio, which he built on Commercial Street, facing the bay. According to Motherwell, the immediate inspiration was the violent splashing of the waves against the bulkhead of *Sea Barn* at high tide.

—John Yau,  
“*Beside the Sea: Robert Motherwell in Provincetown*”

“abstraction” and how an abstract painting can express meaning. For Motherwell, the so-called “subjects of the artist” were not objects but feelings, freed of dross. He recalled this formative moment in an interview with the Archives of American Art:

The real thing started with Matta, who had an oedipal relation with the Surrealists—he both loved and hated them and he was younger, my age, which is to say we were in our twenties and they were in their forties. Matta wanted to start a revolution, a movement within Surrealism. He asked me to find some other American artists that would help start a new movement. It was then that Baziotes and I went to see Pollock and de Kooning and Hofmann and Kamrowski and Busa to see if we could come

up with anything. Peggy Guggenheim, who liked us, said she would show this new business. I went around explaining the theory of automatism to everybody because the only way you could get a movement was to have some common principle. It sort of all began that way.

My father, Peter Busa, told me stories about the Saturday or Sunday sessions at Matta’s apartment in the autumn of 1942. Members of the group were invited to show at Guggenheim’s Art of This Century gallery, side by side with major international artists. My father mentioned that he experienced a “cosmopolitan feeling” in discussions about Picasso and Matisse. The Surrealists were seeking ways to bypass conscious controls in order to reveal some

surprises, even to them. The goal was to reveal the self to the self. Two drawings from the sessions were found in my father’s portfolios. Sometime in 1985, I showed the one illustrated here to Motherwell and he said at once, “Those diamond eyes are Baziotes.” (The second collaboration I found was by William Baziotes and Busa, reproduced in Martica Sawin’s book *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*.)

In one of his journals, my father wrote, “What was surprising to me when I first met Motherwell was his grasp and embracement of modernism. Even in the early forties, this was rare. What made it more curious is that most of us had been painting for ten years. He used to say, ‘Let’s pretend we are not afraid.’”

—CHRISTOPHER BUSA





BLUE GUITAR, 1990, COLLAGE, ACRYLIC PAINT, AND CRAYON ON CANVAS PANEL, 51 BY 39 INCHES, COURTESY OF JEANNIE MOTHERWELL

## Robert Motherwell

### Blue Guitar

*Blue Guitar*, the last collage Motherwell ever made, is an imaginative and touching homage to art and poetry. Using a combination of torn paper, acrylic, and crayon, the collage evokes both Picasso and Matisse—one might say that it reconciles them. Building upon his modernist predecessors, while enlarging the scale, Motherwell's collage hovers between abstraction and representation, taut as the well-tuned strings on a guitar, and full of visual music. Made at the end of his life, Motherwell continued to be true to his modernist roots, and his belief that "the intelligent painter carries the whole culture of modern painting in his head. It is the real subject, of which everything he paints is both an homage and a critique, and everything he says is a gloss."

— John Yau, "Beside the Sea: Robert Motherwell in Provincetown"



LINK HARPER



BLAIR RESIKA

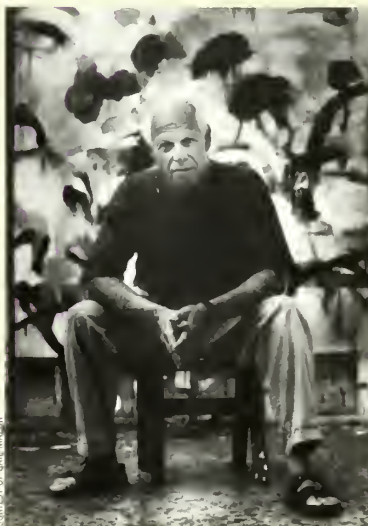


RENAME PONSOLD



CARMEN LEE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ROBERT MOTHERWELL AND RENATE PONSOLD, 1972; JUDITH ROTHSCCHILD AND NORA SPEYER AT A HANGING, c. 1986; PARTY AT NORA SPEYER'S AND SIDEO FROMBOLUTI'S HOME IN WELLFLEET, 1984, (LEFT TO RIGHT) PAUL RESIKA, NORA SPEYER, ELSPEETH HALVERSON, VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN, TONY VEVERS, GRACE HOPKINS; PROVINCE-TOWN ARTS PUBLICATION PARTY, JULY 1991, (LEFT TO RIGHT) LEO MANSO, CHRISTOPHER BUSA, CHARLES BERGMAN; MICHAEL MAZUR; LONG POINT MEMBERS' MEETING; PAUL BOWEN; PAUL RESIKA AND JUDITH ROTHSCCHILD



COURTESY OF GAIL MAZUR



RENAME PONSOLD



RENAME PONSOLD



PROVINCETOWN ARTS PUBLICATION PARTY





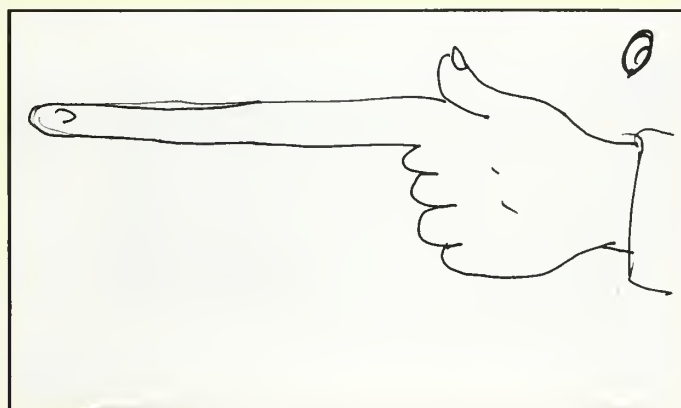
PHOTO BY RENATE PONSOLD



COURTESY OF ROSALIND PACE



COURTESY OF ROSALIND PACE



TOP OF PAGE: LONG POINT GROUP IN 1977, FRONT ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT) JUDITH ROTHSCHILD, FRITZ BULTMAN, VARUJIAN BOGHOSIAN, NORA SPEYER, BUDD HOPKINS, CARMEN CICERO, TONY VEVERS, SIDEO FROMBOLUTI; BACK ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT) LEO MANSO, SIDNEY SIMON, RICK KLAUBER, ROBERT MOTHERWELL

#### LONG POINT GROUP PROJECTS

ABOVE: (LEFT) *LONG POINT GALLERY: GRAY DAY STUDIES*, 1982, LITHOGRAPH, 38 BY 26 INCHES;  
(RIGHT) *LONG POINT GALLERY*, 1979, SILKSCREEN, 30 BY 42 INCHES

RIGHT: CARMEN CICERO'S 2012 RE-CREATION OF A DRAWING DONE BY SIDNEY SIMON AT A MEETING WHERE THE NAME "LONG POINT" WAS CHOSEN FOR THE NEW GALLERY

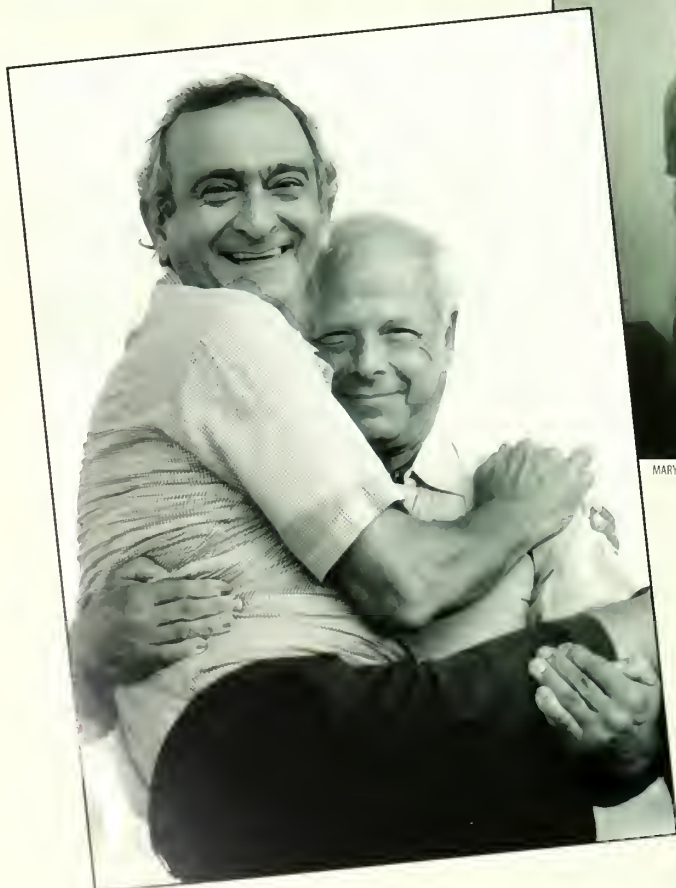




JOEL MEYEROWITZ



MARY ELLEN ABELL



JOEL MEYEROWITZ



RENATE PONSOLD

TOP OF PAGE: LONG POINT ARTISTS IN 1990, (LEFT TO RIGHT) NORA SPEYER, SIONEY SIMON, VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN, EO GIOBBI, SIOEO FROMBOLUTI, PAUL RESIKA, CARMEN CICERO, LEO MANSO, JUDITH ROTHSCILLO, BUOO HOPKINS, ROBERT MOTHERWELL, TONY VEVERS

ABOVE: STANLEY KUNITZ POSING BESIDE *HOMAGE TO STANLEY KUNITZ* BY SIONEY SIMON ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF *TRIBUTE TO STANLEY KUNITZ*, JULY 14, 1985; RIGHT: ROBERT MOTHERWELL WITH HIS DAUGHTER LISE; LEFT: VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN WITH EO GIOBBI



# NEW EXHIBITIONS

## THE TIDES OF PROVINCETOWN

### PIVOTAL YEARS IN AMERICA'S OLDEST CONTINUOUS ART COLONY (1899–2011)

MAY 19–AUGUST 26, 2012 • CURATED BY ALEXANDER NOELLE

INTRODUCTION BY ELIZABETH IVES HUNTER

**P**rovincetown is a place and a state of mind. The exhibition *The Tides of Provincetown* manages to capture the essence of both aspects of the artists' colony, celebrating its pictorial essence over the 112 years of its existence. There have been distinguished exhibitions featuring Provincetown painters in the past.

The Guild Hall in East Hampton, New York, and the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (PAAM) produced an exchange exhibition, *Crosscurrents*, in the 1980s. In 1977 there was a major Provincetown exhibition at the Everson Museum of Art of Syracuse and Onondaga County in Syracuse, New York. However, the significance of the new exhibition lies in the fact that it is the largest and most comprehensive examination of the artists' colony ever completed, as the last Provincetown survey (exhibited over forty years ago) ended with artwork from the 1970s.

The genesis of the exhibition came about quite by chance. In the early summer of 2010, Douglas K. S. Hyland, Director of the New Britain Museum of American Art, was invited to Boston to attend the opening of an exhibition, *Glimpses of a Provincetown Collection*, which focused on work by men and women associated with the town from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Hyland was intrigued. He recognized the names of all the artists represented but had not known of their common association with Provincetown. He began to envisage an exhibition covering the history of the Provincetown artists' colony from its inception in 1899 to the present.

That fall, Hyland and his assistant curator, Alexander J. Noelle, spent time with the staff of the Cape Cod Museum of Art, then moved on for an in-depth visit to Provincetown, where they met with leaders of the artistic community, including artists, gallery owners, and collectors, as well as the staffs of the PAAM, the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum, and the Provincetown Art Commission. The result of Hyland's inspiration and Noelle's research is *The Tides of Provincetown*, which focuses on Provincetown as an artists' colony, featuring over one hundred artists and as many artworks, beginning with Charles W. Hawthorne's founding of the Cape Cod School of Art in 1899—and, thereby, the colony itself—and continuing to the present day.

Provincetown's history is rich in artistic innovation and change. By 1914, we see the growth of the colony not only in size—the Provincetown Art Association was founded that same year—but in the advance of Modernist influences, especially with the influx of expatriate artists at the outbreak of World War I. At first there was friction with the

established traditional schools of art, but ultimately the Modernist style flourished in Provincetown, especially in the work of Blanche Lazzell, Ross Moffett, and other "Early Moderns" such as Hans Hofmann, who came to Provincetown to teach in 1935 and may reasonably be considered as important in his day as Hawthorne was in his. By the 1950s the early antagonism between traditionalist and Modernist had largely played itself out. While Hofmann's influence was felt on a national level, traditional Impressionist techniques were being taught in town by Henry Hensche in his school at the end of Pearl Street, while, next door, R. H. Ives Gammell was teaching in the tradition of the Boston School, synthesizing Impressionism with older and more traditional academic traditions. The end of World War II brought a new influx of young artists to Provincetown, which was at this time on the verge of becoming a nationally known destination for collectors drawn to Modernism, exemplified in the opening of the Tirca Karlis Gallery and the founding of the Fine Arts Work Center in the 1960s.

Given this extraordinary history, it's not surprising that, when Hyland first approached the Cape Cod Museum of Art regarding the exhibition, he said that it was very important to him that the work be shown on the Cape. This was important to me as well, since my father, Ted Valsam, was an assistant to Ives Gammell, my godfather. My early years were spent as a "studio brat," surrounded by artists, models, paint, and canvas, and in one way or another I've spent my whole life visiting, summering on, and living on the Cape. Its art, and artists, are very close to my heart. It's a place where chance meetings grow into deep friendships that last a lifetime.

It's also a place that celebrates a spirit of freedom and a respect for different points of view, an important part of its attraction and ethos since the founding of the artists' colony. And perhaps the natural beauty of the town has influenced this sense of tolerance—it's almost impossible to be small-minded when you're surrounded by water and the kind of natural beauty abundant on the Outer Cape. It's interesting to note that most of the artists featured in the exhibition lived within view of P-town Harbor. I'm reminded of Tony Vevers's words: "You can sit for hours looking out over the water as it does its work, and strangely, not feel lazy—(rather) in a state of bliss, pure, without desire." In *The Tides of Provincetown*, this bliss is reflected in the inspired work of Provincetown artists, which captures the essence of what the artists' colony was, and is.

— ELIZABETH IVES HUNTER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAPE COD MUSEUM OF ART





NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, JOHN BUTLER TALCOTT FUND

## CHARLES W. HAWTHORNE *THE FISHER BOY*, 1908

Oil on canvas on board, 39.125 by 39.125 inches

Among the New Britain Museum of Art's initial acquisitions was *The Fisher Boy*, painted by the acknowledged founder of the Provincetown art colony, Charles Hawthorne, in 1908. The dawn of a noble career shines on the young man's face, enacting the rite of passage whereby a boy earns his manhood. If his oilskin is smudged with Ashcan angst, his face is illumined with optimism as he strides toward the sea, carrying—embracing—a glass jug of fresh water for the voyage. His eyes are mixed with emotion. He could be reciting the mariner's prayer: "Oh, Lord, the ocean is so vast and my vessel is so small."

— CHRISTOPHER BUSA

## EDWIN DICKINSON

### *PROVINCETOWN HARBOR, RAILROAD WHARF IN THE RAIN*, 1928

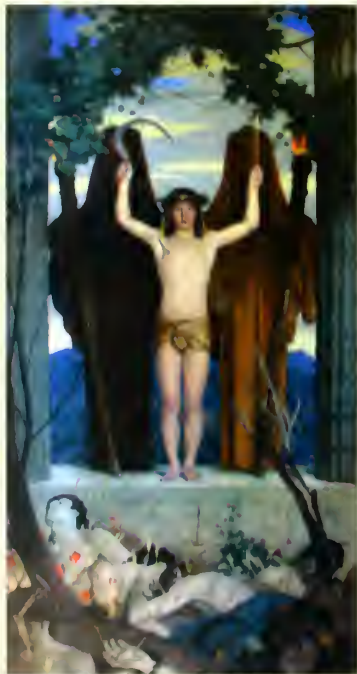
Oil on canvas, 30.5 by 36.25 inches

By the time that Edwin Dickinson painted *Provincetown Harbor, Railroad Wharf in the Rain* in 1928 at the age of thirty-seven, he had perfected the technique of the *premier coup* (meaning "first strike" or "done in one sitting") painting technique that he had learned as a student under Charles W. Hawthorne. The goal of a *premier coup* was to produce a finished work of the highest artistic quality in a single sitting of two to three hours. In his journal, Dickinson recorded that he painted *Provincetown Harbor, Railroad Wharf in the Rain* in one hour during the afternoon of June 23, 1928. This is a wonderful example of the artist's ability to capture the light and atmosphere of a specific location. It reflects his close observation of color carefully mixed from nature and his ability to depict closely related color harmonies.

— MARY ELLEN ABELL AND HELEN DICKINSON BALDWIN



COLLECTION THE PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION AND MUSEUM,  
DONATED BY DANIEL W. DIETRICH II IN THE NAME OF HELEN DICKINSON BALDWIN



PRIVATE COLLECTION

## R. H. IVES GAMMELL *GARDEN OF PROSERPINE*, 1938

Oil on canvas, 48 by 24 inches

Ives Gammell was drawn to allegory and this aspect of his work is represented in this exhibition by *Garden of Proserpine*, which he painted in 1938, on the eve of World War II. Gammell chose classical mythology as a vehicle to express his fear and trepidation over the rise of Hitler's Nazi Germany. Proserpine, or Proserpina, is the Roman counterpart of the Greek goddess Persephone, daughter of Demeter and Queen of the infernal regions—the wife of Pluto, god of the underworld. As the personification of seasonal changes, she passed six months of the year on Olympus where she was beneficent, and six months in Hades where she was stern and terrible. Gammell was inspired by Swinburne's poem of the same name, where the poet references Proserpine's garden of poppies, whose flowers induce waking sleep if picked. Gammell used both the myth and the poem as the armatures to support his painting in reaction to the mass hypnosis of the Germans by Hitler.

— ELIZABETH IVES HUNTER

## BLANCHE LAZZELL *SHELL*, 1930

Oil on canvas, 16 by 19.875 inches

The late 1920s were a highly productive time in Blanche Lazzell's career and, in 1930, she completed *Shell*, one of her most gripping works. This compelling painting displays Lazzell's Modernist style in its maturity. The abstract still life combines the Cubist compositional principles of rhythm, geometry, and asymmetrical space with the artist's personal focus, seen here as a depiction of flowers from her garden and a shell from the beaches of her beloved Provincetown.

— ALEXANDER NOELLE, CURATOR, *The Tides of Provincetown*



THE ART MUSEUM OF WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY, GIFT OF THE ARTIST



# TIDES BY TONY VEVERS

In recounting the reasons for their love of Provincetown, artists tell of the uniqueness of place, the fishing fleet, the exotic Portuguese and, of course, the light—like that of Greece, Venice, etc.

You never find any mention of what, to me, is the most compelling aspect of life in Provincetown—its tide. In what other place where art is made do you find the sea lapping (and sometimes pounding) against the bulk heads that line the shore, then retreating out hundreds of yards toward the horizon exposing acres of gleaming sand? From where you could dive into six feet of water, you must now walk a quarter of a mile or more to dabble your feet in a few inches of seawater.

At 7:20 A.M., Wednesday, March 30, 1994, the tide went from a low of minus 2 feet to a high

of 11.8 feet at 12:58 A.M. And this changes every day in both time and space. No tides are the same. In its irregular regularity the rhythm of the cyclic deep changes daily. To this is added the effect of climate—at every instant the tide is affected by the wind, which moves it from a glossy stillness to a foaming welter, and by the sun, which can turn a sullen calm into a prismatic whirl of sparkling light. The water is a mirror of climate.

The tide is the most human of nature's major events. The moon and the sun are too far away. Too inexorable to be anything than objects of our wonder and adoration. But we connect to the sea, our blood is saline and our bodies evolve in the secret knowledge of our watery origins. Too, like the tide, our blood courses rhythmically, pushed

by the heart—our personal tidal mechanism. We splash, swim, sail and fish in the sea. We can also drown in it.

You can sit for hours looking out over the water as it does its work, and strangely, not feel lazy—in a state of bliss, pure, without desire.

As Robert M. lay stricken on his deck, his request was to take one last look—out over the tidal expanse of Provincetown's harbor. When Herodotus' Greeks fought their way out of Asia they finally saw the sea, Thalassa, and knew that they were finally close to home.

Everywhere the tide goes up and down, but in Ptown it also goes out, to a most dramatic degree, in three-dimensional splendor.

(found among his notes, March 30, 1994)



THE RENATE, HANS AND MARIA HOFMANN TRUST

## HANS HOFMANN *PUSH AND PULL III*, 1950

Oil on canvas, 36.125 by 48.375 inches

In his 1948 book, *The Search for the Real and Other Essays*, Hans Hofmann declared the long reign of one-point linear perspective to be over. He felt that, with the traditional approach, the illusion of space only went in one direction, and argued that a combination of color, light, and shape could create “push and pull,” or the visual tension between forces and counter-forces that gives the viewer the experience of depth and motion on a flat surface. With push and pull, shapes and colors interact to create not only the feeling of space, but of movement as well. Hofmann created the illusion that the composition was “breathing” and led the eye to each part of the picture rather than letting it rest in one spot. In this way, the viewer became actively engaged with the picture—a goal Hofmann claimed all artists should strive for.

— ALEXANDER NOELLE, CURATOR, *The Tides of Provincetown*

## PAUL RESIKA *FANFARE*, 1989

Oil on canvas, 69.5 by 49.5 inches

*Fanfare*, a centerpiece of the exhibition and on the back cover of the catalogue, shows Paul Resika's imaginary vista of the distant Pilgrim Monument, its granite needle showing through the mist as a blue thrust, reaching after white clouds massing in some celebration of illumination, like fireworks, but without the color. It shows white to be what it is, a gathering of all the colors. (It also reminds me of how the Vatican signals that they have chosen a Pope: white smoke begins to rise from a chimney.)

— CHRISTOPHER BUSA



NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, CHARLES F. SMITH FUND

## JACK PIERSON *SELF-PORTRAIT #6*, 2003

Pigment print, 54 by 44 inches

A self-labeled conceptual artist, Jack Pierson uses the photograph as a form of personal memory. One recent series created a mythology focused on anonymous, attractive men who represent the artist himself, his friends, and his lovers. In 2004 Pierson exhibited for a second time at the Whitney Biennial, showcasing this *Self-Portrait* series, which was comprised of fifteen snapshots of nude and seminude men at various stages of life. Interestingly, none depicted the artist himself. Instead, they allegorically narrate his development from an innocent youth through the various stages of sexual maturity. By fictionalizing the documentation of his own life and visually constructing a new identity, Pierson questions the role of the photograph as a representation of reality.

— ALEXANDER NOELLE, CURATOR, *The Tides of Provincetown*



COURTESY OF BERTA WALKER GALLERY



# Helen Frankenthaler

## THREE SCENES IN PROVINCETOWN

By Christopher Capozzola

**1950: WHEN HELEN FRANKENTHALER** first came to Provincetown in July 1950, it must have seemed like a good time to leave New York. The daring twenty-one-year-old painter, who had earned praise from her Bennington College professors and from formidable critic Clement Greenberg, had just had an intense spring. Thanks in part to Greenberg, Frankenthaler had started circulating in the downtown Manhattan art scene. By summer, she had met painters Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, and sculptor David Smith, and started a five-year relationship with Greenberg. She was still a Cubist, but increasingly restless and dissatisfied with Cubism's aging visual vocabulary. So when Greenberg suggested that she take a three-week course in Provincetown with Modernist teaching legend Hans Hofmann, she jumped at the chance. She enrolled in Hofmann's class, which was held at his studio at the corner of Commercial and Nickerson Streets in the town's West End.

The class, as her biographer John Elderfield later summarized it, "was not the resounding success it had promised to be"<sup>1</sup>; Frankenthaler was more evasively polite, noting only that "I was never one of [Hofmann's] many student disciples."<sup>2</sup> Frankenthaler had already seen enough Abstract Expressionism in New York to be bored by Hofmann's insights into the push and pull of line and shape on the canvas. She was far too self-assured to bear watching Hofmann "correct" her paintings with his own brush and knife. And, in any case, she had reached a point when she felt there was nothing left for any teacher to show her.

Which is not to say that there was nothing left to learn, even from an accidental interaction. While working one day in the summer sun, recording the town wharf in oil on a small canvas that she would later title *Provincetown Bay* (1950), a fellow painter came by and offered a tip on how to paint the wharf piles better, so they would look to the eye as if they were planted firmly in water rather than floating on top of a pool of blue paint. Frankenthaler knew better: "He couldn't understand that I didn't want the bay that much in perspective," she later told Elderfield. "I wanted it to be a little flat, parallel . . . to the canvas itself." Frankenthaler's early career was marked by evolutions rather than drastic shifts, and, after that summer, the Cubism steadily disappeared from her work. Her fascination with the play of paint parallel to—and even embedded into—the canvas had only just begun.

**1961-1963:** She spent every summer of the sixties in Provincetown. Together with painter Robert Motherwell, whom she married in April 1958, Helen



HELEN FRANKENTHALER AND ROBERT MOTHERWELL AT THEIR PROVINCETOWN STUDIO, c. 1960  
UNIDENTIFIED PHOTOGRAPHER, BERNARD J. REIS PAPERS, ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Frankenthaler wandered in the dunes, lived cheek by jowl with fishermen, and drank with other artists at the Atlantic House bar. And she worked. In a series of studios along Provincetown Bay and in the rolling hills behind the town, Frankenthaler explored the physical form of the canvas and pressed at the limits of painting itself. By the time of her Provincetown summers, she had long since upset the applecart of Abstract Expressionism with her masterwork *Mountains and Sea* (1952), which introduced the innovation of stain painting, in which Frankenthaler poured paint directly onto an unprimed canvas. In such works, she built on the postwar generation's fascination with spontaneity and immediacy—"how accidents are controlled,"<sup>3</sup> as she put it in a 1965 interview with art critic Henry Geldzahler—and brought to her work an intense engagement with

the raw material of the canvas and the tactile process of painting.

The site of her explorations in 1961 and 1962 was the two-story main barn of the Days Lumberyard on Pearl Street—now the site of the Fine Arts Work Center. While Motherwell worked downstairs on his *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series, Frankenthaler painted upstairs, setting her canvases flat on the studio floor. The summers in Provincetown in the 1960s amplified a deeply experimental phase that Frankenthaler had just entered in her work. In early 1961, she risked her confidence and self-possession and began studying printmaking at Universal Limited Art Editions on Long Island; there, the charismatic Tatyana Grosman helped Frankenthaler gain through prints a richer sense of the texture and the materiality of the artistic process. Around the same



time, Frankenthaler first used acrylic paints, hoping they would be less likely to fade than the turpentine-thinned oil paints of her 1950s canvases. At first, as she told Geldzahler, she found acrylic "scratchy, tough, modern, once-removed," and was frustrated that it absorbed so slowly into the canvas. By all accounts, she was disappointed with her earliest acrylics, among them *The Moors* (1962), a muddy conglomeration of violets and maroons.

Frankenthaler rarely painted directly from nature, although she was a close observer of the sea and the shore and acknowledged that her Provincetown surroundings made a difference in her art. "Anything that happens affecting your sensibility has an effect on what you make," she noted. "My work is not a matter of direct translations, but something is bound to creep into your head or heart."<sup>4</sup> If Frankenthaler used landscape for inspiration, in her paintings it was always one step removed, an evocation rather than a depiction, something she might have described as parallel to the surface of the canvas.

There were several summers of exploration, but for Frankenthaler, "the first of the Provincetown pictures" was *The Bay* (1963), completed in a bayside studio attached to the home that she and Motherwell shared near the corner of Commercial and Allerton Streets in the far reaches of the town's East End. Frankenthaler explained that *The Bay* was "not intended to represent a particular body of water," and it only came upon its evocative title after it was finished. With acrylic technique quickly mastered, *The Bay* emerged from an improvisation with color on the canvas: "It looks like one blue, but there are many," she explained. "I painted the blues and left it to dry. When I came back, I was surprised. . . . In seeing the silhouettes of blue and raw canvas, I thought of the bay—of weather, but in terms of abstract shapes." Its color fields engage and interact in layers of gray, green, and blue, with a tiny gesture of brown that either anchors the viewer in a landscape or convinces us to embrace the accidental and abandon ship, reminding us how little use Frankenthaler had for the unsolicited advice offered on the wharf a decade before.

1967: That summer, she painted *Flood*. Often regarded as her masterpiece, the massive painting was completed "in my 'tree-house' studio, a studio on the second floor, in stands of pine. The studio floor was small, and I wanted to work on a canvas as large as possible. Once the canvas was laid down I had only about a foot of margin to stand on between the canvas edges and the wall. I recall that there was a lot of liquid paint on the floor. The studio was flooded with color." Layering fields of pink, orange, and green, and scattered patches of blank canvas, the boldly overlapping colors of *Flood* expressed the preoccupation with "how accidents are controlled" that had consumed Frankenthaler's entire career.

The intensity and urgency of color would reappear in *Summer Banner* (1968), in which a field of white sets off two massive strokes of orange and red above an unsteady blue passage. Landscape here is not observed, or even broken down into its component parts—not the bay or weather remembered, even abstractly. Rather, we see nature as a

full partner in the process of making art, in dialogue with the physicality of the seaside, the fact of the canvas, the hand of the artist, and the generative space that triangulates them. Frankenthaler continued to be an observer, despite her demurrals. In her 1965 interview, she explained, "I still, occasionally, when I get in a certain type of painting crisis, go back to drawing landscapes," and reflected, "Last summer I did a landscape out the window of Provincetown Bay, a scene I've painted many times before. . . . [But] lately I tend to sit in the crisis rather than going back to drawing."

The summer of 1967 was one of her last in Provincetown. The country was hurtling into the late sixties. The town was changing: as studio rents skyrocketed to the unheard-of price of \$250 a season, Motherwell and other artists complained of "the hi-fi noise of Provincetown summers."<sup>5</sup> And Frankenthaler's place in the art world was shifting. That December, the *New York Times* would identify her as part of the "old guard" and backhandedly congratulate her for graduating "from Den Mother to the dignity of Grand Matron of Honor."<sup>6</sup> Her relationship with Motherwell was changing too: in the summer of 1970, she skipped Provincetown for Morocco and France; the next summer she retreated to Cornwall Bridge, Connecticut, following her separation from Robert Motherwell.

Frankenthaler continued to paint, mostly in New York or at a house along the Connecticut shore, until her death last December at eighty-three.

**FRANKENTHALER WAS DEEPLY** gregarious with other artists, but famously private about herself, leaving few clues that might explain how Provincetown mattered for her art—other than the art itself. We should be careful not to read her work too literally, lest we be like the stranger on the wharf trying to impose control where accident has flourished. Frankenthaler warned viewers not to scrutinize her paintings for recognizable markers of the sites summoned in their titles—"I usually name them for an image that seems to come out of the pictures," she explained to Henry Geldzahler. But even if Provincetown was more the site of her experimentation than its cause, we shouldn't be afraid to look for its effects in her work. For all her disavowal of the view from her bayside studio, for all her embrace of sitting in the crisis, Frankenthaler was an unintended landscape painter, intently scrutinizing the Cape Cod landscape in search of insight into accidents, and accidents of inspiration. ✂

#### NOTES

1. John Elderfield, *Helen Frankenthaler* (Abrams, 1989).
2. Helen Frankenthaler, "Thoughts about Hans," in *Hans Hofmann: A Retrospective*, edited by Karen Wilkin (Braziller, 2003).
3. Henry Geldzahler, "An Interview with Helen Frankenthaler," *Artforum* 4, October, 1965.
4. This and the following four quotations are from: E. A. Carmean Jr., *Helen Frankenthaler: A Paintings Retrospective* (Abrams, 1989).
5. *Days Lumberyard Studios, Provincetown, 1914–1971* (Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 1978).
6. John Canaday, "Art: The Whitney Museum Annual," *New York Times*, December 13, 1967.

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# A Complicated Marriage

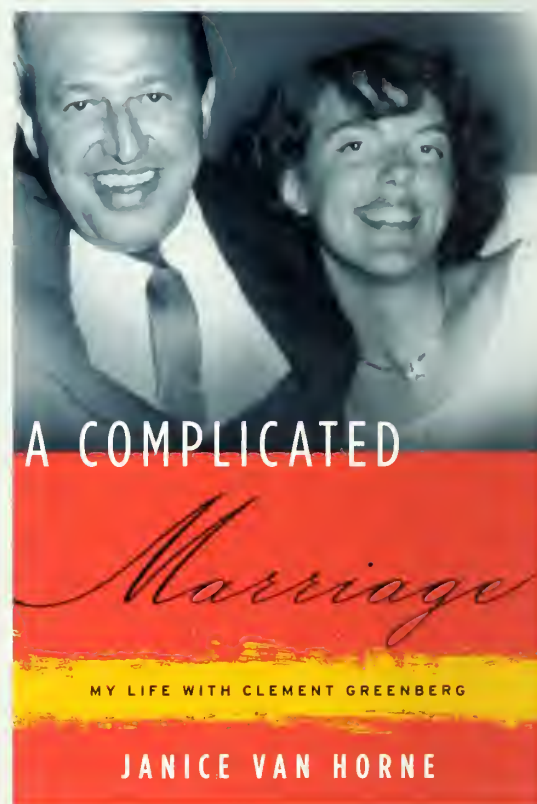
MY LIFE WITH CLEMENT GREENBERG

By Janice Van Horne

(Counterpoint Press, 2012)

1955. Janice (Jenny) Van Horne is a twenty-one-year-old, naive Bennington College graduate on her own for the first time in New York City. At a party, she meets forty-six-year-old Clement Greenberg who, she is told, is “the most famous, the most important, art critic in the world!” Knowing nothing about art, she soon finds herself swept into Clem’s world and the heady company of Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, David Smith, and Helen Frankenthaler, among others. Seven months later, as a new bride, Jenny and Clem spend the summer in East Hampton near Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, and she feels even more keenly like an interloper in the inner circle of the art scene. Disowned by her anti-Semitic family for marrying a Jew, her deep, loving bond with Clem would remain strong through many years, even as their relationship evolves into an open marriage.

Jenny embodies the pivotal changes of each passing decade as she searches for worlds of her own. She moves away from the 1950s tradition of wife and mother as she dives into psychoanalysis, the theater world of OOB and the Actors Studio, and success in business. Written with humor and grace, *A Complicated Marriage* provides an intimate and honest view of her time. In doing so, she demythologizes the art scene and its icons, and redefines the meaning of a “good marriage.” Excerpted here is a chapter from the book.



## Hans and Miz Hofmann

It was late Friday afternoon of Labor Day weekend in 1957 when I passed for the first time through the front gate of Hans and Miz’s house in Provincetown. As usual, when venturing off with Clem, I had no idea what to expect.

We had come a long way. The Cape Codder train to Woods Hole, then the long bus ride to the farthest tip of Cape Cod, and finally a taxi to the Hofmanns’ house near the end of Commercial Street, the town’s main drag. At first sight, it was like no artist’s house I could have imagined—a white colonial fronted by a picket fence with a brick path that invited us to the front door through a garden ablaze with flowers. But then we crossed the threshold. I thought I had stepped into Hofmann’s body and soul. The floors, the furniture, the stairs, everything, painted in his signature vibrant, primary colors. A high-gloss Technicolor Toyland. Upstairs, in the large square guest room, the same. Here the late-afternoon light bounced off the sea and danced with the rainbow colors of the room. Never before had I been in a place that made me so happy to be alive.

The Hofmanns had spent twenty years of summers there by that time. There was an inherent stability in that house such as I had never known.

My family had never lived anywhere longer than a few years. From place to place we carted our things, shedding bits and pieces along the way, but we never called the walls that contained them “home.” This was a home, one of impeccable order, run by Miz with precision and love. I sensed that Miz and Hans moved through those rooms on harmonious, parallel paths—Hans also had his own path, which led from the back of the house to his studio—each endowing their domains with complementary skill and passion.

The Hofmanns were then in their late seventies, my grandmother’s age, but there the similarity ended. That weekend I would learn that who we are is a reflection of the life we live on any given day, not the mere sum of the years we have lived. My grandmother lived the daily life of a sheltered, timid old lady and had done so for most of her life. The Hofmanns had the exuberance and self-assurance of people who knew how to enjoy life to its fullest. Each morning we were there, we would all go out to Race Point to swim in the ocean, which, thankfully, was calm enough even for me. I had never seen my grandmother swim, much less wear a bathing suit. And I had never had a grandfather. For generations the women in my family had managed at a young age to lose their husbands one way or another.

And then there was the German-ness. Again, so different from my family, who even as second-generationers still lived in an insular community and filtered their sensibilities, their views of people and the world around them, through their German-ness. The Hofmanns, in this country for only twenty-five years, kept their door always open. That weekend people streamed in and out—artists to have a chat, students to say good-bye to their teacher. The Hofmanns’ accents, still dripping of Munich, had at first put my supersensitive ears on red alert. But it didn’t take long to be seduced by the *gemütlichkeit* and Miz’s cooking.

That first evening, Miz and I engaged in a long talk about food. She probably asked me whether I liked to cook and whether, having grown up with German heritage, I had any favorite foods. I would have told her that no, I had never learned to cook, that my mother didn’t like to cook, and that my favorite dinner had been hot dogs, canned peas, and soggy rice. She no doubt would have noted the knock-wurst connection, before adding that long-cooked rice was a wonderful German breakfast cereal, a dish she remembered fondly from her own childhood. I chimed in with my own memories of *zucker butterbrot*, a treat I loved when I was little. The next morning,



there was the large pot of stewing rice on the stove. She ladled it out for me with dollops of butter and brown sugar, and, sure enough, slices of bread slathered with butter and sugar. Children together, we sat down and ate our porridge.

Hans had an extraordinary presence. His big, round, open-as-the-sun face still shines in my mind. And his feet, in the sandals of summer, large and square, the big toes raised up, as if ready to spring into action. For a thick-set man, his movements were unexpectedly agile and quick. There was a heat coming off him, a furnace at full blast. Even in repose, the fires burned. At times I saw him sitting alone in the backyard, plunged so deep inside himself that I wondered if he would be able to find his way back.

I had come to take for granted that artists took up all the available space and filled up the air with their single-minded passion for their work. Though I admired that passion, it didn't make them particularly accessible. Sometimes I would try to discern the difference between self-absorption, which I could understand, and coldness, which I deplored. A fine line, and often I wondered if I was misreading the two. The distinction mattered, because in those days I was concerned about whether I liked those people and, more important to me, whether they liked me.

Many times I heard artists described by women as teddy bears, usually the burly types, like David Smith, Rothko, Hofmann, and even Pollock. Let me say that I never met an artist who was a teddy bear. All too often, the heat within did not spill over into warmth toward others. Hans was a hard call. As compelling as I found his robust energy, it was tamped down by an impenetrable layer of detachment. As if he were saying, *What doesn't serve my art doesn't serve me*. On the other hand, Clem, who never, to my knowledge, had been called anything even faintly resembling a teddy bear, and despite his relentless passion for art, was an outspoken believer in life before art. And how grateful I was for it.

Hans may have been uninterested in general conversation or, heaven forbid, small talk, but he was known as the greatest communicator. Just as his energy lit up his art and any space he was in, for his twenty-five years as a teacher it lit up all the artists who were fortunate enough to walk into his schoolyard, or be present at the renowned lectures he delivered in the late thirties. Clem had just moved into the city from Brooklyn and had begun to mix and mingle with the downtown artists. He heard some of those lectures and often spoke of the influence they had had on his perception of art. I could imagine Hans's voice, guttural and booming—perhaps more booming by the time I met him, because by then he was quite deaf. Miz would often signal him to put in his hearing aids, signals he would usually ignore. Around Clem, he was interested in a dialogue and he would put them in. Around many others, not so, and at parties, never.

Hans was the first and most important star in my small, though rapidly expanding, firmament of painters. He and I shared a bond no one knew about, including him. In 1955, shortly before my college graduation, he had introduced me to art.

One night my new circle of art friends commandeered me into helping them prepare for the installation of some pictures by a painter called

**During those last days of summer, Provincetown was a moveable party town. . . . People flirting the night away. Like New York, it never slept.**



(LEFT TO RIGHT) FRITZ BULTMAN, MIZ, JANICE, DAVID SMITH, AND HANS, 1959

Hans Hofmann. I didn't need coercing; I was in the middle of a brain-numbing attempt to index *Finnegans Wake* à la Kenneth Burke, an exercise that I would soon look back on as the absurdist dead end of the modernist spiral. My friends' project would be an all-nighter in the Carriage Barn, the multi-purpose arts space at that time. We unpacked the pictures, flipped them facedown, attached screw eyes and measured and strung wires, re-tacked stripping, and finally flipped them over again and stood them around the main floor of the barn.

Then came the good part. We broke open a quart of Mr. Boston's gin and Ritz crackers, and talked through what remained of the night. And we played with the art. Moved the paintings around. What looked good next to what, and why. And which ones we liked more than others, and why. And in the process, I looked at art for the first time. I touched the paint, the textures of art, for the first time. With Hans, I learned how to handle pictures—with respect but not awe, carefully but not timidly. How to look at a picture separately and next to others. I learned that they had fronts and backs, that they were man-made, by someone who had something to say. And I had fun with art. Such was my night with Hans.

Now here I was two years later, sleeping in his house in Provincetown, being mothered by his wife. I hadn't attended the opening reception of that Bennington retrospective. I would have considered myself too cool for that sort of formal folderol. Hell, I would have had to brush my hair. Clem would have been there. Hans and Miz, too, no doubt. Would Clem have fallen in love with my *blauen augen*

across the crowded room? Unlikely. Everything in its own time.

That weekend on the Cape we lived moment to moment. During those last days of summer, Provincetown was a moveable party town. Oh, we had our quiet times with the Hofmanns on the beach or sitting around the kitchen table. Sometimes Hans and Clem would wander off to the studio while Miz and I hung out on the porch. But other times, Clem and I would stroll down Commercial Street, running into everyone we knew and then some, joining up and going back to this one's studio or that one's deck for a drink, then moving on, eating a bit here and there, parties forming on the spot—invitational parties were rare and never as much fun—and maybe ending the evening dancing at the Flagship or the Pilgrim Club, or wherever there was music, which was everywhere.

Oh, it was free and easy. People flirting the night away. Like New York, it never slept. A few men even flirted with me. Something that never happened in the city. The only time someone did make a pass at me was during an opening at Martha Jackson's gallery. A young guy had crashed what he thought was a party, gotten drunk, and maneuvered me into a corner. He was quickly ushered out. I always figured I was off limits. After all, a wife was a wife, or at least Clem's wife was Clem's wife. But that night confirmed what a small, tight-knit family I had married into. Another lesson learned: There were insiders and outsiders.

And how nice to be an insider in Provincetown. All the same people one saw in the city, but not the same at all. Everyone so laid back and glad-handing.



Maybe because it was like a small-town neighborhood where people walked, everything and everybody just a shout away. I think of Milton Avery in front of his house, waving hello and inviting us in. He sat backlit by the sea. Pipe at hand. Sally nearby. Another soul-mated pair, like the Hofmanns. I was always on the alert for what a life partnership might look like. Were there clues I could learn from? If it was possible for others, maybe it would be possible for us.

Milton asked if I would like to have a go at chess. I demurred, saying I barely knew how the pieces moved—not quite true—all the while kicking myself for the timidity that kept me from sharing a few moments with that kind, gentle man whom I wished I could know better. I, who adored games of all kinds, had early on backed off chess as being beyond me. After all, it was a man's game and therefore veiled in arcane practices and complexities inaccessible to females. And Milton smiled and said, "Perhaps another time."

And I think of Adolph Gottlieb, his skin so dark and weathered from sailing. Who would've thought? An artist who routinely won racing trophies against the pros. A sportsman, not the suit-and-tie artist we hung out with in the city. Either way, I particularly liked Adolph and Esther, he soft-spoken and thoughtful, she more forthcoming and interested in what I called "real" conversation than most artists' wives. We would now and then have dinner at their place in the East Village or they would come to eat with us, usually ending the evening by heading a few blocks south to the White Horse, where, crushed in the back room over drinks, Adolph and Clem would dig deep into art talk and I would try to listen over the din. Eventually my mind would glaze and I would sit back and let myself drift, thinking of how young all the kids seemed who jammed the tables sloshing their beers, even younger than I was, and that if Dylan Thomas were slouched over the bar maybe he would remember me as the girl who had recently sat at his feet after his reading at Bennington—that is, if he weren't already dead. Later I would lay my head on my pillow and smell the cigarette smoke and beer on my hair and think, *I must be in the real world now*, all the while wondering why it wasn't more fun. In Provincetown we all smelled of the ocean.

On our last day, my mother drove up from her place in Falmouth at the other end of the Cape to pick us up. She had recently taken up painting and was studying with an ex-student of Hofmann's, John Grillo. In her swishy print dress, white pumps, and sun hat she was gussied up and at her coquettish best that day. As I had since I was a child, I cringed at her enactment of the coy temptress, to my eyes so blatantly affected. Hans, however, seemed to be taken with her, judging from his smile and the way he leaned into her. And, needing a signal from Miz, he put in his hearing aids.

After an alfresco lunch, Hans led her to a bench farther down the porch and I could hear the murmuring of German through the kitchen window as I helped Miz with the dishes. I wondered what they were conspiring about in that dreaded language of whispers and secrets. But that day the sun was

shining, I had a cool vodka and tonic near at hand, and I stopped cringing. I saw the sweetness of the scene, and another side of Hans.

Clem and I would return to the Hofmanns' in 1958 and again in 1960. By 1961 our life had assumed a stepped-up momentum of its own. The spontaneous days and nights were over. We continued to exchange visits in the city, and Clem would visit Hans at his studio. And we invariably saw them at the small dinners Sam and Jane Kootz would give for the "boys," as Sam called the artists in his gallery. Too formal by far, the Kootzes lived high; they always employed a "couple" and lived on Park or Fifth Avenue in their cutting-edge world of Henry Miller and Georg Jensen. I would put on my fanciest dress and dangly rhinestones. I don't know why, but with the Kootzes one just did dress up, even the artists, even Clem.

After an elaborately endless dinner, conversation tautly anchored by our hosts, we would adjourn to the living room for Napoleon brandy and liqueurs, demitasse, and cigars while Jane and Sam reclined in their matching white Eames chairs. The overall effect was chrome and crystal, chill and leather. I, in a low-slung Mies chair, my dress too tight, my head muzzy with too much booze, waited for the first hammer blows of a Kootz headache. No matter who was there on any given evening, I never got to know anyone better, no hair was ever let down, nothing personal was exchanged. I always felt the artists were there as hostages. Heaven knows why we were there, except that in those days all too often we simply went where we were invited.

When I next looked around, or so it seemed, I was at Miz's funeral in 1963. And by 1966 Hans, too, was gone. My affinity for the Hofmanns was connected primarily to my times with them in Provincetown. It was there that I had endowed them with so much. I wonder what they would have thought if they had known that they were the German family I wished I'd had. That feeling no doubt accounted for the strong sense of loss I felt when they were gone. And it also contributed to the pleasure I got from the superb "slab" painting Hans gave us as a wedding present. As the decades passed, it became necessary to occasionally ask an art dealer to sell a painting for us. The Hofmann would be one of those. It was the only picture I truly missed.

I like to think of the Hofmann house as still being there, much as it was during their decades there. However, I am told that it has changed hands several times, and while the house and studio behind are indeed still there, they appear shabbier, the garden is untended, and a large modern house was built across the street. There would no longer be a rainbow dancing on the bedroom ceiling upstairs. Of course, the only testament to the greatness of an artist is the work he leaves behind. Their houses and sundry accoutrements are only so much fuel for the mythmakers. However, the house will always be preserved by me, not only as the place that embodies the greatness of the artist who worked and taught there, but, most important, as the place that speaks to the solidity and harmony of the two lives that lived there.

**HANS'S PASSIONATE SPIRIT** touched me once again when I found these two handwritten letters he wrote to Clem four years after my first visit to Provincetown. Clem had tucked them away among the Hofmann catalogs on his bookshelf, a filing system he was partial to. I include them here, as written.

February 17, 1961

Dear Clemm—

*I thank you sincerely for the enormous work you did with your book on me [Hofmann, Editions Georges Fall, 1961]. I go basically almost completely with it—almost but not completely.*

*The reason: I never paint a bad picture.*

*I may not always paint a successful one. As a juror which I quite often was I always resented to function in the roll as a critic. I resented it because whoever criticizes himself. The work criticizes back.*

*And as a teacher I was constantly aware that one must never be a schoolmaster by entangle oneself in enormous or academic steril problems that annihilate the vital approach to creation. The vital approach to creation is deep rooted in the faculty of the mind to sense and recognize the inherent quality of the medium of expression to bring the qualities into appropriate relation to each other for the creation of a higher, of a new and complete independent, quality which the means of expression have met in themselves but which transcend the spirit of creation.*

*Only this to me is Art. In following this principle it is impossible to paint a bad picture.*

Most affectionate yours  
Hans Hofmann

July 22, 1961.

Dear Clement—

*Your book [Art and Culture, Beacon Press, 1961]—your great book—its arrival with dedication a great and most pleasant surprise to me—how could it be otherwise. [Hans must be referring to Clem's personal inscription to him. The book is dedicated to Margaret Marshall, arts editor of the Nation.] It mirrors in my opinion a span of great revolutionary time in the realms of all the Arts in which we have all participated creatively in one way or the other. It analyses all events most profoundly and in greatest honesty. What I most admire is the courage of attack from a polemic point of view that will connect much of the historical blunders so far falsely build up about this events.*

*I congratulate you—your book will make its mark on history as it is full of wisdom—its destination will be to sustain and accelerate creation on its highest level.*

*I am so deeply enwrapped in my work that almost nothing exists any more for me outside my work. It is the reason for this "belated" letter. Excuse me therefor and accept please my simple "I thank you!"*

Love to you both  
Hans Hofmann

Before beginning work on *A Complicated Marriage*, JANICE VAN HORNE edited two books assembled from Clement Greenberg's archive at the Getty Research Library: *The Harold Letters and Homemade Esthetics*, designated a New York Times notable book of the year. She lives in New York City in the same apartment she and Clem moved into in 1960. For more information and photos visit [www.acomplicatedmarriage.com](http://www.acomplicatedmarriage.com).



# Mitchell Johnson

## THE PULSE OF COLOR

By Christopher Busa

**B**ASED NOW IN California, Mitchell Johnson was seasoned in New York by study with Paul Resika at Parsons School of Design; Resika, our local maestro, was himself a student of Hans Hofmann, who taught a generation of artists to think within a certain Abstract Expressionist ethos that valued authenticity over illusion—the frank acknowledgment that a painting of a red barn is not a red barn, but a composition in oil paint mixed in certain proportions. Such an ethos implicitly asks about the difference between an abstract and a representational painting. Mitchell Johnson's answer, evolved over three decades of painting, is not in the paint but in the way our eyes see paint.

Let us look at a recent painting, *Skagen (Hose and Bench)* (2010–2011). The title refers to a town near the northern tip of Denmark that thrusts into the North Sea, where riptides, not unlike those at Provincetown's Race Point, are formed by the convergence of tides coming from different directions. The painting evokes a tangible sense of Nordic enthusiasm for seaside life in the clusters of energy jamming densely around a glimpse of a garden bench, with no person present as witness, looking down on the black circle of a garden hose with a circular red center, the only circular shapes in the painting. The title, citing the obscurity of the hose and the bench, makes us recognize more clearly what is implied in the masking harmonies of rectangular colors that weave through the painting, like wind furling a flag. One can feel the in-and-out of color and hide-and-seek of objects within color harmonies that seem sometimes to be blinking. There are reds, there are whites and off-whites, and there are a few blacks. There are scale shifts in the sizes of these mostly rectangular and sometimes trapezoidal shapes. The shift in scale, from spots of color to large areas, acts to make our eyes adjust. In his thinking about painting, Johnson has referred to the moon illusion: when the full moon is seen on the horizon it looks huge, but when seen from a high point in the sky, it becomes tiny, a dot, distant and cold. The harvest moon on the horizon, and the full moon seen when we crane our necks to see it shrink in proportion as it rises, are the same full moon, identical in size, altered from the rich color on the nearby horizon to the pale luminosity so far above us.

A painter intensely exploring the lessons of color, Johnson encountered a book that transformed his understanding: *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing* by Margaret Livingstone, who writes about issues of concern to working artists, especially the mechanisms of our eyesight and our mind's interpretation



TRURO #6, 2005, OIL ON LINEN, 16 BY 20 INCHES, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ST. HELENA, CA

of image and color. He paid special attention to Livingstone's discussion of a painting by Monet, *Impression, Sunrise* (1872), which spawned the name of the Impressionist movement. Monet later reflected, "Landscape is nothing but an impression, and an instantaneous one, hence this label that was given us, by the way because of me. I had sent a thing done in Le Havre, from my window, sun in the mist and a few masts of boats sticking up in the foreground. . . . They asked me for a title for the catalogue, it couldn't really be taken for a view of Le Havre, and I said, 'Put *Impression*.'"

Johnson was fascinated by the alteration of the apparently brightest spot—the sun and its reflection on water—becoming invisible when its color is absent, leaving only luminosity to be accounted for. In black and white, the brilliant sun appears prosaically shrouded in mist. We discussed this concept in more detail last summer, when I spoke to Johnson in an interview in Provincetown.

"In this famous painting," Johnson said, "the sun is *pulsing*. Why? It's this dual response within your neurology of identifying things spatially through two different ways, one between light and dark, and the other with location. Monet uses these

two channels of our neurology to make sense of this space. But it is curious how the two channels get stored separately and do not become merged together. You simultaneously have this experience of not coming together but existing in parallel that makes that rising sun pulse—makes it active." Perhaps, when there is pulse in a painting, we feel the evocation of a mystery.

Occasionally, as in *Giant Truro* (2008–2011), Johnson will return to a finished landscape, introducing new colors and shapes to create a push-and-pull. He explained, "The grid of colors that is placed below a representational painting instinctively alters and energizes the painting, making it seem to be a continuation of what was already happening."

I asked Johnson how scale shifts of the same color functioned in his paintings. "You can create action between colors by shifts of value or shifts of saturation or contrast of primary colors," he said. "This other issue of small areas versus large areas is also what Hofmann explored, and most of the painters I like, whether it's Morandi or Albers, and certainly Cézanne and Corot—there was all this invention going on. To whatever degree their



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TRURO, 2007, OIL ON LINEN, 16 BY 28 INCHES, PRIVATE COLLECTION, LOS ANGELES, CA

paintings were representational, there are always these pockets and moments of invention—that is what separates them from their contemporaries, and makes them so important to us as painters in looking back for kindred examples in the past."

Artists instinctively gravitate toward certain artists. Johnson mentioned Morandi, a painter who used very closely valued hues; extremely close, so subtle differences vibrate and make you aware of nuances you've probably never noticed, because they were never pulled together with such discrimination.

Flying long distances on annual migrations to different countries, new settings, Johnson is a painter driven by some painterly instinct to put together bits, pieces, and fragments of color impressions acquired in actively looking elsewhere. He is alert to how different atmospheres interact—finding in Denmark what he can't find in Mexico. Following lengthy sojourns in France and Italy, he's made a number of visits to an island in the Baltic Sea, the subject of current paintings.

For years, Johnson has been looking at Morandi. In 2005, he went to the Museum Morandi in Bologna, "floored" to see Albers and Morandi paired in an exhibition. He had been looking intently at their work for the past three or four years, but he had never consciously made a direct comparison. He realized he had a desire to combine Morandi's feeling for composition and pattern with Albers's feeling for color.

Locally, we have developed a Cape aesthetic founded on the theories, teaching, and practice of Charles Hawthorne, who aptly demonstrated to hundreds of students over thirty years how to think of space as being constructed from "spots of color" in relation to adjacent "notes." Hawthorne taught color relations seen in actual light, boldly articulated by obliging students to daub paint with a small palette knife so the daubs could build up into shapes of mixed colors. Through accumulated acts of acute attention—adjusting, modulating, shaving, scraping, refining—they would do just enough to make it look spontaneous.

If Johnson's paintings are color lessons, they offer the profound delight that the artist found in building structures in Lego blocks with his ten-year-old son: "I definitely think about how the light is hitting them and how they are interacting. The funny thing is, you can actually take a colored Lego block—there's one that's kind of chartreuse—and embed it in a giant wedge of brown ones and then a wedge of white ones and blue ones, and you will see the chartreuse shift. It shifts because our mind shifts; our experience of that color changes. The fringe colors are open to changing drastically."



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Albers's series *Homage to the Square* demonstrates how truly physical a color shift is able to be, if the shift is deftly tuned. Johnson likened this phenomenon to how tepid water can feel either hot or cold depending on what temperature you are comparing it to—just as one might liken a heightened sensitivity to color as a “haptic” sense, in which the eye can feel the image as tactile—as if the hand had touched what only the eye sees.

Over the past five summers, Johnson has returned to paint the summer cottages that hug the shoreline along Beach Point. *Truro* (2007) and *Truro #6* (2005), painted two years apart, revisit the same space between two dwellings while shifting the angle of perception and the horizontality of the canvas. He said he works “overtly” to find ways to contrast the water and sky with something man-made. In the earlier work, a window seen in shadow, a black rectangular smudge, appears in the later work on the opposite wall. The sea between the houses is a wide stripe of very dark blue; the wall is a blaze of white light, struck along the bottom by a shadow that could indicate the curved bow of a boat. A lot of Johnson's secrets are alive in shadows, painted with the same attention to hue and luminosity as areas not shaded.

Johnson remembered an opening for Paul Resika in San Francisco, when the artist had become very upset. Johnson recalled, “Resika had worked so hard to get a black in the painting to do what he wanted, and the framer, after it was shipped, introduced another black! The issue is not whether the black frame competes, only the fact that it does change the painting. I wonder if we ever, objectively, see the painting. We see it in one room, but it is altered on another wall. In the gallery, the paintings are greatly altered by



GIANT TRURO, 2008–2011, OIL ON LINEN, 72 BY 56 INCHES, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ANN ARBOR, MI, IMAGE COURTESY SCHOOLHOUSE GALLERY, PROVINCETOWN, MA



SKAGEN (HOSE AND BENCH), 2010–2011, OIL ON LINEN, 16 BY 22 INCHES, PRIVATE COLLECTION, MENLO PARK, CA, IMAGE COURTESY SCHOOLHOUSE GALLERY, PROVINCETOWN, MA

their organization in a formal installation. When you are making paintings so attached to color, you have to find a moment where the color is doing something special. And color will do that in a wide range of light.”

If many of Johnson's paintings are titled after the places that inspired them, no such places actually exist. Each one is a collage of compressed intimacies spread out over the months it takes to paint them. He has done what Edwin Dickinson called *premier coup*, in which a painting is completed outdoors in one “blow.” Yet his typical practice is to hold a painting for several months, or more, in the studio, revisiting the painting to see if it stands a test of repeated looking, often involving a process of memory revision, where a succession of impressions gained over weeks or months is expressed as a continuous flow.

The spirit of Johnson's places evolves organically into others that are original in individual character—as Johnson puts it, “engagement endlessly engaging.” ▲

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is publisher of Provincetown Arts.



# Rindler's Dangerous Plastic

By Ellen Raquel LeBow



*Plastic is the excrement of oil.*

— Norman Mailer

**M**UCH HAS BEEN written about Bob Rindler's site-specific installation *Recycling Vernacular, Collecting Sorting Illuminating, Moment Place Object* at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum last spring. It delighted many, bemused others, and, because his formal medium is discarded, molded plastic objects, it has been described as "playful."

This is an irresistible first response. In contrast to the cool, bluish light of the museum's Hans Hofmann gallery, the primary circus colors of bundled, hung, stacked, and barely contained plastic cast-offs gave the impression of a wild-child's game. And compared to paint—even acrylic paint, or stone, or paper—preformed plastic is not a medium to be taken seriously. On his radio show at WOMR, *ArtTalk*, Chris Busa correctly remarked on the "twinkling pleasure Bob gets from his work." And Rindler describes himself as a "raconteur and bon vivant," so clearly a sly kind of play is at work in his thought process.

But that is not its driving force. Rindler wants his pieces to be seductive and dangerous. In that sense they pass play to become an intellectual, political, cultural, and aesthetic commentary motivated by his preoccupation with process—process before anything even reaches the hands of the artist, process, and design.

"I don't collect cars or toys," Rindler points out, "I collect individual solid shapes and colors of plastic. Everything in that show was designed to an inch."

Within a swarm of blue objects are all the variations of blue. In a swarm of red or green, white, black—shapes undulate like color-coded cities seen from the sky. Bowls stack upon each other to form light-filled, fluted towers. And thus his collection of plastic "things" transmutes, taking the earth's black oil past its rubber ducky stage and into the realm of abstract.

A hunter of the dump's "swap shop," Rindler finds his philosophy there: "I was interested in seeing if I could make art out of the ultimate utilitarian object. Can you make something precious out of that which is not precious? Can you take something intrinsically not beautiful and make it beautiful?"

Rindler is interested in plastic things not only for their beauty, but also for their cultural significance—or lack thereof. "All plastic is originally chemical, a liquid in the ground," he points out. "It's fairly new—'30s, '40s—but now it's completely pervasive in our lives; industrial design has embraced it. Many decisions are made for any plastic thing. First a commercial need is determined. Then the object is designed by a sophisticated, well-educated designer, poured into a mold, made in multiples, and sold. You buy it for twenty-nine cents, you use it, you throw it away."

"So much of plastic stuff is about excess and functionality in some way. I'm gathering it when its functionality is over. What is its life after that? It's not something you honor or think highly of. You never covet plastic things, or want to collect or keep them. Where do these things go, where do they end up? We know: They end up in our landfills, our oceans."

Or in the hands of an individual who, by elevating them into elements of pure shape and color, allows them to transcend old and demeaning cultural associations. But not completely. Removed from Rindler's mass compilations, starfish cookie





FACING PAGE: ROBERT RINDLER SITTING  
IN THE MIDST OF HIS EXHIBITION;  
THIS PAGE: *RECYCLING VERNACULAR*,  
COLLECTING SORTING ILLUMINATING,  
MOMENT PLACE OBJECT, PROVINCETOWN  
ART ASSOCIATION AND MUSEUM, 2011;  
DETAILS FROM THE EXHIBITION  
PHOTOS BY JANE PARADISE



cutters and yellow Mickey Mice, pink hair rollers and green Gumbys, return to their names and their functions, some to their fetishized symbols.

In a near reversal of other pieces in the exhibit, Rindler bore down on the deeper meaning of plastic toys in a poignant and socially complex amalgamation titled *Found Boys: An Overland Tsunami of Male Minikin Lemmings Racing Toward the Edge of Geometry in Size Places With Arms Raised in Triumph and Defiance*. *Found Boys* is a monument in miniature, made up of a good-natured mob of plastic figurines, all male, all recognizable icons of pop culture (the term *Size Places* is a rueful nod to enforced formation in a boys' grade school). Together the figures form a wave-like curve oozing toward the straight edge of a pressboard cliff.

Like God surveying the crowd from above, you single out your childhood familiars—Porky Pig and Elmer Fudd, Bob's Big Boy, The Hulk, Ronald McDonald, Shrek and his donkey, Woody and Buzz, Jack Sparrow, Peter Pan, Popeye, Batman, Godzilla, Navy Seals, foot soldiers, Indians, Transformers, Ninja Turtles, wizards, robots, aliens.

"The army's marching," Rindler says. "I started from the back and kept building and building. It





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made its own shape. It struck me how people buy these for their kids who want them, then discard them. But it also had to do a little with the fact that I'm gay. I wasn't interested in tools, in soldiers. What are the images that boys grow up with? How is the male represented to young, pre-testosterone boys?"

It is, of course, as the Hero. "He is always about a task, aggression, physicality. He always seems to be about power, assertiveness, leadership. 'Sweet boys' overcome their sweetness by fighting."


In some pieces, Rindler explains, he deliberately tried to use shapes that were not recognizable. But with this one, he chose known archetypes of maleness. "They were caricatures," he says, "3-D cartoon drawings. Some were proportionally trying to be a real boy, but most of them were body distortions, exaggerations, and each had 'A Purpose.' They had moustaches, and weapons. Few girls' dolls have anything in their hands. But boy toys have weapons. It's always, always in some way about taking control, dominating something. Even the wimpy ones are somehow the masters of their own fate."

All these, Rindler points out, were things cranked out for boys to admire without ever thinking outside the box: "They didn't have male violin players, male ballet dancers."

In *Found Boys* each mannish fantasy faces the same horizon, a hoard of unlikely companions slipping under the wave of our collective unconscious. "I was interested in the massiveness of it," Rindler explains. "Emotion against Order, a tongue-in-cheek wave of lemmings. But some people didn't even get it was made up of boys."

For those who did, it was a chance to find a known secret revealed, a reawakening to the vulnerability of little boys to media manipulations, and how, as adults, we remain caught in the tsunami of plastic. It is a substance, Rindler's work might warn us, with which we'd better make peace, because even if we throw it away, it's here to stay.

In one magic moment right before the installation was to be taken down, Rindler allowed the volunteers who'd helped him lay it out in the beginning select a few objects to take home. Each volunteer had carefully worked on a field of color or the spacing of a hanging cluster. To them, what they chose was no longer just a piece of anonymous flotsam, it had alchemized into one precious player in a broad and thought-provoking scenario. It became a memory, a fragment of art worthy of a shelf in the home rather than in the swap shop.

In that invisible transformation alone, Rindler accomplished his aim. 

*ROBERT RINDLER is a graduate of Cooper Union and the Yale School of Architecture. He served as President of the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, Dean of the Cooper Union School of Art, Associate Provost of the Rhode Island School of Design, Dean of Students at the Boston Architectural Center, and Art Department Chairman at the University of Vermont. He is now a full-time resident of Wellfleet.*

*ELLEN RAQUEL LEBOW is an artist and arts writer who lives in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. She exhibits at the Rice/Polak Gallery in Provincetown.*



# Looking for That Tomboy Spirit

## A CONVERSATION WITH CHRISTINA SCHLESINGER

By Susan Rand Brown

**T**O FEEL AT HOME in two or maybe three places on the map of geographical possibilities is all most people need. Some travel and remain, while others, like Christina Schlesinger, the archetypal prodigal daughter, venture out and return. Chrissie to the many friends and close acquaintances made over a lifetime of work, travel, art-making, and activism, she was born the second daughter and middle child to artist-writer Marian Cannon Schlesinger and Harvard academic-Washington insider Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., an attractive, sociable couple who numbered John F. and Jackie Kennedy among their circle of friends.

Children of Harvard-affiliated scholars and theologians, the Schlesingers themselves had been brought up in the academic enclaves of Cambridge. The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard is named for Christina's paternal grandparents (Elizabeth was a suffragette). Henry James was a neighbor; a few decades later, so was Julia Child. During Chrissie Schlesinger's girlhood the family summered in Wellfleet, alongside Edmund Wilson, Alfred Kazin, and Marcel Breuer. One summer they rented a small place on a sandy cliff near the ocean; later they bought a house on Slough Pond.

Our conversation took place in Schlesinger's Tribeca apartment, in a narrow loft building not far from the Brooklyn Bridge. She shares the space, a colorful mélange of homemade tiles, Mexican folk art, family photos, and artwork, with her daughter, Chun, now fifteen, and sculptor Nancy Fried. At an early stage in her career, Truro artist Breon Dunigan did carpentry work in the apartment's kitchen, adding her artist's signature by painting a tile on the counter (one among many painted by friends). Frida Kahlo would feel right at home in the large bathroom, its toilet surrounded by tiles and raised to suggest an altar.

A large space, brightly lit and separated by French doors from the rest of the apartment—a true room of one's own—serves as Schlesinger's studio. Lately she has been combining painting and writing, incorporating fabric, paper, and acrylics in a style that would sit comfortably with a small Rauschenberg. As I asked about the journey of her life and work, her responses came back in a breathy, musical voice, words sailing as fast as they could go.

After four years at Harvard (her mother, now almost one hundred, attended Radcliffe), where Schlesinger majored in English Literature, a summer at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine left an impression in an unexpected way. The flaring temper of the late 1960s made the traditional curriculum seem irrelevant; together with an aspiring student muralist, Schlesinger created colorful protest art (one antiwar fresco depicted Uncle Sam eating a rat) to hang in a nearby barn. Truro resident Ben Shahn, whose photography during the 1930s documented the urban poor, was the Skowhegan faculty member who defended her political mural-making to conservative colleagues.

Schlesinger's experiences at Skowhegan were followed a few years later by a complete break with the East Coast. "My parents were being divorced," she explains. "I had a very famous father, and just wanted to get away. I needed to know that people liked me for myself. It's a confusing thing, having a famous name. . . . My father is a wonderful writer. It took me a long time to read his books."



TOMBOY ON BLUE FLANNEL, 1994, MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS, 20 BY 16 INCHES

Feminism and activism were in full boil when Schlesinger moved west to Los Angeles in 1971, a fertile direction for an outgoing artist determined to explore her spiritual, sexual, and aesthetic identity far away from the academic communities where her last name—the expectations imposed upon a "Schlesinger" by then feeling like a corset—would be recognized.

Following her instincts and without missing a beat, she found work and friends, studying for a while with Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago at the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia (CalArts), a hotbed of women's art theory and communal art-making. Her original plan was to move to Los Angeles for the summer. Then she met (in a women's bar in Venice) well-known West Coast muralist Judy Baca. Just getting started, Baca discovered in Schlesinger a creative soul who could give substance to an art movement perfectly attuned to the times. "Judy asked me if I wanted to help paint a mural. We developed a plan for a city-wide mural project, and eventually we created the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), one of the premiere public art organizations in the country, still going strong. We sat around thinking of what to call it, and I was thinking of the Weathermen, 'It only takes a spark to light a prairie fire,' and so we called it SPARC," Schlesinger recalls.

With a new body of work and experience behind her, Schlesinger moved back East in the early 1980s. She headed to Manhattan, arriving in the East Village just as cheap rents were attracting a wave of urban artists and galleries. Her work quickly attracted interest and shows. She also returned to spending summers in Wellfleet, which led to showing at the Cherry Stone Gallery in 1982, when it was still on Railroad Avenue, and forming a relationship with owners Sally Nerber and Lizzie Upham that lasted over twenty years.

A residency at the Cummington Community of the Arts in western Massachusetts led to a series of waterfall and birch-tree paintings, exhibited in the East Village, Soho, and Los Angeles. Grants from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation and the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation came one after another in 1988 and 1989.



In the summer of 1988 she studied Chinese landscape painting at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in eastern China (Hangzhou), drawing with ink on rice paper; soon she was making collages by gluing rice paper to canvas using flour and water paste. The Hal Katzen Gallery (its founder/owner is the son of sculptor Lila Katzen; the family summered in Provincetown for many years) showed her work in the early 1990s; so did the Jan Baum Gallery in Los Angeles. Both shows were reviewed in *Art in America* in 1991.

Around this time Schlesinger became involved with the Guerrilla Girls, activists using street theater to protest the invisibility of women artists in major museums and blue-chip galleries. A Guerrilla Girl would appear publicly in the guise of a dead woman artist. Schlesinger chose Romaine Brooks, whose portraits and self-portraits helped define the elegance and the fluid sexuality of the 1920s.

Remembering these high-flying days, Schlesinger does a fast-forward to the mid-1990s and the *Tomboy Series* created for her master's thesis show at Rutgers, where she received an MFA in 1994. For these powerful paintings, never shown again—"I still have not found a dealer willing to show women with dildos," she comments wryly—Schlesinger tweaked conventions of hermaphrodite imagery from Greco-Roman art and made it her own.

"Even in Los Angeles," she explains, describing her work on a mural in East LA, "working with gangs not as a middle-class white female, I was looking for that tomboy spirit. I was the middle child, I was sort of wily, and had to figure out how to survive. The *Tomboy* paintings were a way of tapping into that strength, that tomboy strength."

We discuss one of her mother's paintings of her children, done in an Early American folk-art style, which is on the back cover of *I Remember: A Life of Politics, Painting and People*, the second volume of Marian Cannon Schlesinger's memoirs. The Schlesinger daughters are depicted here as dolls; Chrissie, the baby, is in a long white christening dress. "We used to have terrible fights about getting me into a dress," she remembers. "Being a tomboy was what got me out to California, got me to paint murals; it's always that thing that saved me."

Schlesinger describes her large, mixed-media paintings of the intrepid Dorothy and her dog, Toto, inspired by a 1950s coloring book based on *The Wizard of Oz*. Schlesinger began the *Dorothy Paintings* in 2001, when she adopted Chun and was studying illustrations from children's literature. Creating paintings of a powerful young girl also tapped into Schlesinger's tomboy spirit. "I made a girl, larger than life—the paintings were six feet by four feet—a curious, mischievous, and willful Dorothy—with my mural brushes, using the same technique and beginning with the grid I'd use for a mural. So again, I feel like I am always going back to find that strength of a tomboy.

"When I did the *Tomboy* paintings, I used my old flannel shirts, painting on top of them. And later, with the *Dorothy* series, I used material that had personal significance. I had studied with Miriam Schapiro, who always used fabric, and there was Sigmar Polke [a German painter whose work layers



THE KISS, 1990, OIL ON CANVAS, 54 BY 40 INCHES

dream-like imagery]. So I always liked fabric, but it wasn't until I could connect working this way to my personal experience that it became part of my process." Grinning, she adds, "I am also a little bit of a New Englander, who likes to use what I have."

Schlesinger explains the delicate design in an encaustic painting (where hot wax bonds image to



LITTLE GIRLS, 1994, OIL AND MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS, 20 BY 16 INCHES



HOWDY, 2001, OIL AND MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS, 54 BY 40 INCHES





GIRL ON SWING, 2004, ENCAUSTIC ON CLOTH ON PANEL, 7.5 BY 7.25 INCHES



SQUARE DANCE, 2011, ENCAUSTIC ON MATERIAL ON PANEL, 16 BY 20 INCHES

surface), incorporating her mother's painting shirt, fabric that sat for years on a sofa in their Wellfleet house. Other pieces incorporate a soiled napkin, thread from a shirt, sign-language cards seen on the subway, images from Chinese tea bags. "The butterflies in this pattern make me think of picnics in the summer," she says about a piece hanging on the wall.

Schlesinger learned encaustic techniques in the mid-1990s while teaching at the Ross School, a middle school in Southampton on the tip of Long Island. One of the school's original faculty members, she smiles as she remembers an early project, "painting a big mural with the kids." She rented painter Peter Busa's studio in East Hampton from his widow, Ross colleague Alex Cromwell, then found additional studio space nearby, which she still uses. She stayed on the faculty until 2005, teaching medieval cultural history, surprised by how naturally she moved into the role of professor, her father's daughter come home.

Her last year at Ross, she had a one-person show, *The White Swan Hotel*, named after her painting of three Chinese male figures seated around a table. The image was based on tea bags used at the White Swan Hotel in Guangzhou, a meeting-place familiar to Schlesinger and others who have adopted children from China.

Schlesinger retired from Ross the year her sister, Katharine Kinderman, died. The two had become very close. At the same time, her father was becoming noticeably weaker (he died in 2006). "That was when Chun and I moved back to the city so we could spend time with him. We really enjoyed each other's company. They say I got along with him best of all the siblings. We'd tease each other and laugh."

Not quite two years after her father's death, Schlesinger was diagnosed with stage four non-Hodgkin lymphoma. She traces the ways her cancer and recovery, a process that took over two years, affected her work. "Even when I got well, there was

a period when I was too depressed and exhausted to paint. I'd walk into my studio and walk out. Then when I finally did have the strength to go back, I started making abstract paintings. This was completely unexpected. I also began writing poetry. So maybe I have started putting images into my poems," she muses.

For her show this August at Gallery Ehva, Schlesinger is preparing a series using encaustics on material on panels incorporating geometric shapes influenced by Greek mathematics. She is also working on bound, accordion-style books that blend image, text, watercolor, acrylics, and snatches of poetry. The project—intimate, personal, and fragile—seems a lifetime away from the public, collaborative mural-making process with its grids, large brushes, and expanses of bright colors. "I pour as much energy into these as I do into my bigger paintings," she says with a sigh.

Like an Asian scroll, individual storytelling pages fold out and expand into surrounding imagery, creating horizontal journeys. Schlesinger pours through a book: several pages incorporate inside flaps of envelopes, each design a little different, marrying the impulse to save and reuse with the diarist's impulse to reveal as well as conceal.

A natural raconteur, Schlesinger tells a complex story of meeting Georgia O'Keeffe when the notoriously reclusive painter was squirreled away in New Mexico. Before sending Schlesinger and a friend to a remote desert area on what amounted to a wild-goose chase, the senior painter queried the younger women: "Who do you make art for?"

That question lingers as Schlesinger pours energy into the small handmade books. "This is work where I am trying to answer some need inside myself. I keep adding images, faces. I am enjoying doing these immensely: images and texts, poems and collage. They are not commercial; yet I feel if I died and left them behind, these would be a record of my life. There was this period of about two years

where I feel that I stepped out of life. I have come back. I started making paintings, I started writing poetry, I started making these books."

Schlesinger is also gathering material for a memoir, just now rereading the journal she kept as a preteen when the family was in Europe. "It's very detailed. I am writing every day. Reading it now, I am seeing this little girl who is very observant. I even write about meeting Peggy Guggenheim." There are also boxes of letters to be combed through from her grandmother Schlesinger, the woman who early on encouraged her to stand on her own two feet and whose support meant so much.

"When I was young, I was so ambitious," she explains. "I wanted to make murals, I wanted to show my work, I wanted to change the world. I really modeled myself after my father. I liked the way he lived his life. He had an effervescent quality that was wonderful to be around. At sixty-five, I still feel young, but I am looking at my life, asking how did I get from here to there and who am I now. . . . And so this is a process of self-discovery. I feel like I am on the brink of I don't know what, happy to be having this show in Provincetown. The paintings are like getting dressed up and going to a party, the elegant going out into the world thing, creating objects that can sell. The books are more like poetry." Schlesinger looks up at me. Her voice is filled with its own unique collage of energy and wistfulness. "I am always trying to define myself, as a woman and as an artist." ❧

SUSAN RAND BROWN profiled the painter Lillian Orlowsky for the 2004/5 issue of Provincetown Arts, and has since written about artists Ellen LeBow, Barbara E. Cohen, Mike Wright, Sky Power, Marion Roth, and Breon Dunigan. Brown began writing about the arts in the 1970s, and has profiled many of the Outer Cape's major artists for the Provincetown Banner (and its predecessor, the Provincetown Advocate). She has spent summers in her family's Commercial Street home for five decades.



# Amy Kandall

## WARRIOR PRINCESSES AT THE ESMOND WRIGHT GALLERY

By Maura Coughlin

**A**MY KANDALL'S NEW series of ceramic warrior princesses invite their viewers to embrace a range of contradictions. Their surfaces are at once parched dry and lusciously glazed, austere and extravagant, ugly and gorgeous, stripped down and excessive. Put into play (and sometimes opposition) is text and image, surface animation and sculptural depth, color and line. Borrowing at will from her background in painting, printmaking, and clothing design, Kandall mixes metaphors and allusions while binding color to form. In their very materiality, these sculptures are made of stoneware that has been impregnated with color, stamped with pattern, or abraded and stressed.

Kandall fearlessly weaves together white and brown clay bodies, well aware of the visceral associations conjured by muddying or fusing her ceramic references. Color, in these works, is not mere surface: it is of the very fabric of the clay. Erasing boundaries or associations of the refined and the earthbound, the clay becomes a fabric that is woven, hung, and folded about these forms. As it strengthens, binds, conceals, and reveals the female figures within its folds, it is insistently sculptural. Conjured from clay is metal, cloth, hair, skin; surfaces emulate draping brocade, silk, or chain-mail armor; but they also read as impenetrable, encasing shells.

Both archetype and architecture, the female form is sheathed in clothing, being at once in a tower and the tower itself: caged and contained in these fantastic costumes, as if both decorated and armed for an unnamed ritual. Formal regalia seemingly empowers the wearer: it supports her yet ensnares her, tells her how to behave, and silences her critics. The female body is returned to repeatedly in this work—the body as the place of memory, the embodiment of memory, and the surface upon which life's stories are inscribed. These elongated female forms evoke ancient feminine archetypes—like the Minoan Snake Goddess or Aztec “devouring mothers.” At the same time, their battle gear, their transformative armor, their mutations and amputations evoke the postapocalyptic landscape of *Mad Max*. Kandall's armored warrior princesses, evil queens, mother warriors, and wounded heroines tell stories, stories written on their bodies. ❧

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AFTER LIFE WARRIOR, 2012, CERAMIC, 30 BY 10 INCHES



# Galería Cubana

## GIVING ARTISTAS CUBANOS A VOICE IN AMERICA

By Trish Crapo

**S**HE OPENS THE TUBE and hefts the large roll of canvases onto the floor at José Martí International Airport in Havana. As groups of travelers swerve to avoid the obstruction, Michelle Wojcik submits to a last-minute inspection.

"The idea is that the artwork has already been documented and they're asking me randomly, 'Okay, where is *this* piece?'" Wojcik says, recounting the incident during a conversation at her Provincetown gallery. Artwork leaving Cuba must be registered with the government, and inspections such as this are meant to ensure that "no national treasures leave unaccounted for."

Wojcik, owner and curator of Galería Cubana, usually returns from her buying trips with an average of 125 pieces, so unpacking and repacking artwork at the airport, where no proper space has been set up to accommodate it, can be nerve-racking. "I've had people almost step on artwork because I'm unrolling it in a crowded airport; it's just mayhem," she says.

Wojcik holds one of roughly thirty licenses issued by the US Treasury Department to import art from Cuba. Since 2007, she has been representing Cuban artists at Galería Cubana in Provincetown, currently across from the library at 357 Commercial Street. Wojcik chose Provincetown because she was looking for a place "known to be fairly liberal and open-minded." Its history as one of the oldest art colonies in the United States and its thriving gallery scene also made Provincetown a good fit. Wojcik hopes that her gallery can help to strengthen cultural ties between the United States and Cuba by providing opportunities for Americans and Cubans "to get to know each other through art."

Art is one of the very few professions that has been permitted as private enterprise by the Cuban government since the 1990s. Last year the Cuban government began permitting private enterprise in several other areas as well. Under the US embargo, the only business permitted with Cuba is small-scale agricultural trade and art importation. Consequently, Wojcik is one of the few Americans who engage with Cubans on a level of business in any way.

"It presents its challenges or interesting lost-in-translation moments, if you will, doing business in Cuba because this is a country where people are not really accustomed to it," Wojcik says. "Just to have someone give me a receipt can be complicated. Artists ask, 'What do you mean? *What* do I have to do?'"

Every detail of bringing artwork back to the States is more difficult than one might imagine. "To give you an idea," Wojcik explains, "you can't buy a packing tube in Cuba. You can't buy a box in Cuba. You can't necessarily find a roll of tape in Cuba. I've learned a lot of lessons about preparing myself to leave Cuba. I have to be really moved by the work because it's a lot of effort to get it over here. And honestly, I don't know that I think I'm such a great salesperson—I just love the work so I can talk about it and be passionate about it."

**WOJCİK'S PASSION** for Cuban art began while she was doing graduate work in social anthropology in Havana. She was particularly interested in the effects of what has been termed the "dual economy," when American dollars were still allowed in Cuba, "... and you saw doctors and lawyers becoming bellhops and taxi drivers, anything to get access to the dollar."

After receiving master's degrees from American University in Washington, DC, and the New School for Social Research in New York City, Wojcik worked as Assistant Director of the World Policy Institute's Cuba Project from 2001 to 2004. In this capacity, she researched the effects of the US embargo on the people of both Cuba and the United States. During a summer of fieldwork in Cuba, she found herself exploring the streets of Havana.

"I was really taken by the artwork," she remembers. She frequented some galleries but gravitated more toward working studios, which she says were "open



EDEL BORDON, *LA ISLA FLOTANTE (THE FLOATING ISLAND)*, 2010, OIL AND ACRYLIC ON VELLUM, 15.25 BY 13.25 INCHES

to passersby in a very interesting way." In the United States, artists might invite viewers in for an open studio event once a month or so; in Havana, the atmosphere was both more vibrant and more casual. It was easy to wander in and out of studios when artists were working. Meeting artists gave Wojcik an interesting lens into life in Havana. "But I also thought the work was very special."

Cuban art is threaded with influences from French Modernism, African tribal art, Mexican artists such as Diego Rivera, and Caribbean folk art. "You see a lot of Surrealism," Wojcik says, "you see a lot of Cubism. And you see certainly a lot of folk art and a lot of African influence. It all comes together in a really brilliant way, I think—in a very different way than what you see elsewhere."

One of Wojcik's employees, Fermin Rojas, agrees that there is a remarkable quality to the art: "There's a Cuban spirit and it translates into the art. And it's very unique." Pausing, he laughs. "Perhaps that's a biased opinion because I'm Cuban."

Rojas left Cuba in 1966, on one of the US-sponsored "Freedom Flights" that, over an eight-year period, brought more than 250,000 Cubans to America. Until this February, when he arranged for a tourist visa in order to accompany Wojcik on a buying trip, Rojas had not been in Cuba since the age of six. "It's just starting to dawn on me that I'm going back after forty-six years," he said, about a week before his departure.

Rojas doesn't like to talk about Cuban politics. During the winter months, he lives in Fort Lauderdale, a community in which political feelings about the Castro government run high. "We're not here to make a political statement," he says, of Galería Cubana. "We're here to represent artists."

Rojas believes that the political dialogue often takes precedence when a more important—and more interesting—topic is the quality of Cuban



People who travel the Caribbean are used to seeing very commercial art, he explains. In contrast, he feels that the work at Galería Cubana is on a par with international contemporary art.

People may not realize how much cross-fertilization occurred between Cuba and Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, he and Wojcik assert. Cuban painters, such as Eduardo Abela and Wifredo Lam, contemporaries of Picasso, studied and worked in Paris, absorbing the ideas and styles of Surrealism, Cubism, and Modernist Primitivism. When they returned home, these artists blended European Modernism with Cuban influences, such as Afro-Cuban religion or, in the case of Wifredo Lam, the Chinese mysticism of his Asian heritage.

"The next really important leap into the contemporary art scene came in 1981," Rojas explains. Eleven young art students, tired of the "didactic, realist Russian schooling that was being promoted at the time" launched an exhibit called *Volumen Uno*. About ten thousand people showed up over two weeks to see the controversial show in Havana, which included performance and installation works as well as paintings, photographs, and prints. *Volumen Uno* demonstrated that artists in Cuba would push back against stylistic restrictions imposed by the government and cracked open the art world there to greater experimentation.

In the middle room of Galería Cubana, Wojcik points to Edel Bordón's series of still lifes painted in 2003 on salvaged Soviet wallpaper as a quiet statement of resistance to Soviet restrictions. In one of these paintings, a ripe, red slice of watermelon buzzes with colorful flies that are looser, more tropical—more alive—versions of the staid patterns of the paper beneath.

Perhaps because they expect more of a Soviet influence, people who come into the gallery are often surprised at the variety of work they see on the walls, Wojcik says. There is no one style of Cuban art, she asserts, and many of the artists she represents work in multiple styles and mediums.

Wojcik likes to use her Commercial Street gallery to display "a cross-section of what's happening in the Cuban art world" and rotates the work in the gallery often, sometimes rehanging the entire space every two or three weeks. Abstract work by the painter NOA shares the walls with, among others, the family scenes and seascapes of self-taught artist Sandra Dooley, Orestes Gaulhiac's recent *campesino*-style paintings, and Edel Bordón's detailed drawings, some of which, such as *La Isla Flotante*, touch on darker, more political themes.

"This is a great piece," Wojcik says of *La Isla Flotante*. In precise lines, the drawing depicts two figures back-to-back, straddling a floating palm tree. "Something like this is representing Cuba floating in one position and being pulled in another."

IN NOVEMBER OF 2011, Wojcik brought Edel Bordón and his wife and former student, Yamile Pardo, to Galería Cubana's second location on Harrison Avenue in Boston. Here, Wojcik more often runs solo or two-person shows and, once it



YAMILE PARDO, *LA SOMBRA (THE UMBRELLA)*, 2011, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 30 BY 20 INCHES

became legal to do so, has invited artists to come for opening receptions and gallery talks. This was Bordón's and Pardo's second trip to the United States under Wojcik's sponsorship.

Central to Pardo's exhibit, titled *From the Everyday to the Existential*, was a series of bright paintings of ordinary items. At the gallery talk, Pardo said that she likes to choose objects that might seem trivial to others and then elevate them through her work. She most often chooses objects associated with women: a handbag, an umbrella, a fashionably slouchy boot. She refers to the paintings, with a smile, as "still life with a Pop Art interpretation."

Bordón teaches painting at the San Alejandro School of Art in Havana. Some of his works at Galería Cubana resemble etchings but are in fact drawings made on a dense vellum that is used in the manufacture of book covers in Cuba. Bordón incises into the coated paper with a needle driven into a pencil, creating lines of unusual depth and dimension.

"Sometimes a lack of materials leads to creative solutions," he says, shrugging. Bordón remembers what is known as "The Special Period" of the 1990s, when Russia withdrew economic support from the island, as being some of the most difficult but also most creative years for artists in Cuba.

In 1992, two thousand warehouses closed on the island, he remembers. "There was not even a pencil." Some wanted to close the Alejandro School but he and others encouraged students to work with alternative materials. If they couldn't have pencils, they would draw with chalk. If they couldn't have paper, they'd draw on cardboard torn from cartons. Students salvaged objects from dumpsters

and assembled sculpture. For one show, Pardo recounts, students cut figures from old wooden barbecue restaurant signs and exhibited them on the benches in the town square of Trinidad.

"There is a lot of need still in Cuba," Wojcik says. "You can go—you *do* go—into stores where shelves are bare." On her trips, artists tell her how little canvas and paper there is. This lack of materials has driven artists to develop new papermaking processes and many prints are being made on handmade and recycled papers now, a development Wojcik finds fascinating. "Down the road, I think this is something that's going to be really important. Their use of paper is phenomenal."

Though she does represent some artists who are becoming well known, Wojcik's priority is to work with emerging artists. "I did that purposefully because I think there are a lot of artists in Cuba that need an outlet," she says. "And the sales would really make a difference for them."

Representing unknown artists is financially risky, especially since Wojcik most often buys work outright. Returning work to Cuba if it didn't sell would be complicated, if not impossible. Bordón and Pardo express gratitude that Wojcik has surmounted these difficulties to give them "an artistic voice in America."

Wojcik is concerned with more than sales, they say, which makes her more than the ordinary *galerista*. They are grateful that, in her dealings with artists, she emphasizes "*las experiencias del descubrimiento*"—the experiences of discovery—rather than the economic aspect of art, challenging them to keep from falling into the creative rut of continuing to produce what has sold before.

"I really like to see someone continually challenging themselves to do something new," Wojcik says. "That takes commitment and passion."

Most of all Bordón and Pardo value the relationship that has developed. "This is the first time a gallery owner has become a friend," Bordón explains. "*Algo que no es común en el mundo de las galerías.*" This is something that is not common within the world of galleries.

One and two friendships at a time, Michelle Wojcik is fulfilling the mission she envisioned for Galería Cubana: "to introduce artwork rarely seen in the United States, support artists on the island, thereby strengthening cultural ties between the two countries." In the process, she is opening doors that have been closed for more than fifty years, bringing the peoples of two estranged countries closer together through one of the most human impulses: art. ▲

TRISH CRAPO is a writer and photographer who lives in Leyden, Massachusetts. She writes a fiction review column for the *Women's Review of Books* and profiles poets and artists for the *Recorder in Greenfield*. Her poems appear in the newly published *Open Field: Poems from Group 18*, Open Field Press, Northampton, Massachusetts.



# An Amy Arbus Affair

By Matthew B. Biedlingmaier

**I** SPEAK WITH AMY ARBUS on a balmy Monday in mid-March, a few days before her next shoot. For the past six months, between teaching and traveling and working on the sequel to her 2008 book, *The Fourth Wall*, Arbus has been photographing her most dynamic, visually arresting series to date: the *After Images*.

"Like most of my projects," Arbus says, with a chuckle, "I had no idea how I was going to produce it. But I knew I had to do it, and, so far, I haven't stopped. It's like a love affair, and I don't want this relationship to end just yet."

The idea came to her in Provincetown, following a conversation with a friend, writer and actor David Pittu. "David had just gotten a cocker spaniel," Arbus recalls, "and at one point he said to me, 'I feel like we should be a Courbet portrait.' I could picture it immediately—David and his dog, poised and posed and captured perfectly in that moment—and I thought to myself, *there's something to this; there's something here.*"

For the rest of her time in Provincetown, when not teaching at the Fine Arts Work Center, or relaxing at a table by the water at the Red Inn, sipping a cup of English Breakfast tea with milk and honey, Arbus was in the library, looking through art books. "I don't really have a background in art," she admits, "but I know what speaks to me, and I was struck by how many images I found that I could see as a part of this series. It was exciting, and I embraced the challenge."

The result can only be described as homage—superbly detailed photographic representations of paintings, many of them portraits and all of them classics, that burst with clean, crisp lines and smoky shadows juxtaposed

with bright, vivid colors; in essence, a daring, wholly original series of photographs that evoke, with style and originality, the paintings on which they're based.

I ask Arbus what the response has been to the *After Images*, if others have shared the same exuberance I expressed when seeing the work for the first time, immaculately placed on a crisp sand-colored wall in her East Village apartment. She's hesitant to answer, maybe for superstitious reasons but more likely because of her disarmingly sincere modesty, although eventually she admits that the response has been overwhelmingly positive, in particular by friends and colleagues who are most familiar with her work.

On its own, the *After Images* is undeniably impressive. But when stepping back and looking at it as a part of the bigger picture, the latest chapter in a professional career spanning four decades, the effect is even more resonant. Yes, it can stand alone, but to know about Arbus and her work, the places she's been, the people she's worked with, what she's captured on film through the years, the *After Images* is on a different plane altogether.

I'm moved to remember the story Arbus once told me about the first photograph she ever took, in ninth grade, for a photography class. The image was of an apple, sitting on a ledge on the rooftop of her family's building in New York. The backdrop was menacing, with dark clouds and gloomy skies suggesting the arrival of a sudden, brutal storm. "When I showed the photograph in class," she says, "everyone thought it was brilliant. My professor, all my friends, everyone—they kept telling me how good it was." As Arbus puts it, she was intimidated: "I was afraid I'd never be able to make



AMY ARBUS PHOTO BY JUSTIN AUE-GOODSTEIN



ABOVE: MICHAEL CERVERIS AND PATTI LUPONE/SWEENEY TODD, NYC, 2005

RIGHT: RICHARD WINDOR AND NINA GOLDMAN/MATTHEW BOURNE'S SWAN LAKE, NYC, 2010

ALL PHOTOS ©AMY ARBUS







NINA/AFTER NUDO, NYC, 2012 PHOTO ©AMY ARBUS

another image that would elicit that kind of response. So I just stopped. I didn't photograph again for a long time."

Indeed, it was a while before Arbus picked up a camera again. But, like Arbus herself, the time she spent away from the darkroom was colorful. She built yurts, learned how to farm, and even attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where she studied the flute and the alto sax. But, eventually, she found her way back to photography.

Since then, she's published four books—*No Place Like Home* (1986), *The Inconvenience of Being Born* (1994), *On the Street: 1980–1990* (2006), and *The Fourth Wall*—and her work has been featured in over one hundred periodicals around the world, including *New York* magazine, *People*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *New York Times Magazine*. Her photographs are part of the permanent collections of the New York Public Library and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. She has had twenty-one solo exhibitions worldwide.

In 1981, she began her tenure with the *Village Voice*, shooting a series of potent black-and-white portraits on the streets of New York City that would become a monthly fixture in the style section. The series, *On the Street*, deftly captured the essence of the city during one of its more fascinating and culturally layered decades: the 1980s.

"I photographed people that I thought looked great," Arbus says pointedly. "People don't often dress that creatively anymore. It's really a testament to the era—to the city as well as to those who were a part of it." She describes her instinct to portray her subjects as "superheroes," detailing her method of photographing from a low angle to make them look taller, and using a flash-fill technique to make them "pop" from the background.

The results yielded some of Arbus's most recognizable work to date, including pictures of a vintage Madonna draped in a long, stained overcoat, and the band The Clash, relaxing against a storefront on Broadway, with boom box-carrying groupies in tow, waiting to be filmed as extras for Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy*.

Arbus speaks fondly of her time photographing on the streets of New York, reminiscing about the days when the city was a place where creativity was born and bred and didn't cost an arm and a leg. "My fear is that New York is changing too much," she says. "It was easier to get by back then—we could live hand to mouth and still make art." She worries that now it's just too prohibitively expensive, shutting out the kinds of people it needs to maintain its legacy of artistry and imagination, and giving access only to those whose pocketbooks allow them to take advantage of it.

Speaking to this, Arbus is and always has been a photographer to whom artistic integrity supersedes financial gain. She funds most of her own projects independently, without the aid of commissions or grants, and the *After Images* series is no exception.

Given the scope of the project, and the time commitment each image demands, the costs are numerous; there is a small crew, a stylist, a makeup artist, assistants, the talent (e.g., the actor, actress, or dancer used as the subject of each shot), postproduction work, printing, and, of course, the studio space itself.

Almost all of the images from the *After* series have been prepped and shot in a backdrop studio near Union Square.

The studio is home to stylist Cynthia Altoriso, whose husband, Charles Broderson, has owned Broderson Backdrops since 1974. Altoriso was familiar with Arbus's work, in particular, *The Fourth Wall*.

Released to critical and commercial success—including being branded a "masterpiece" by the *New Yorker*—*The Fourth Wall* is a collection of photographs taken over the course of four years; the subjects—all actors and actresses, in full costume and makeup—were shot outside of the theaters where they were performing. The process demanded removing the performers from the comfort of the carefully crafted sets to which they had grown accustomed, thereby placing them out in the unpredictable *real world* environment, to elicit the kinds of raw emotional reactions that Arbus hoped to capture on film. And capture them she did, consistently, time and time again.

"It seemed like everyone thought of it as such a novel concept," Arbus says, "but I didn't really see it that way; I didn't think I was reinventing the



wheel, so to speak.” She does, however, discuss the complexity of the project, both in terms of the theoretical concepts the title evokes, as well as the strenuous task of organizing and executing the shoots themselves. She also remarks, more than once, that the most interesting aspect of the whole project was hearing the responses of the performers themselves. “Some of them were really uncomfortable, others totally embraced it,” Arbus remembers. “In the end, I try to get beyond what I’d preconceived—it’s a process, and we’re collaborating, working together to create an arresting image.”

The images, which include Ethan Hawke from his role in the 2006 production of *The Coast of Utopia*, Lynn Redgrave from 2006’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, John Malkovich from 2005’s *Lost Land*, and Ed Harris from 2006’s *Wrecks*, among many others, are in part what sparked the union between Arbus and Broderson Backdrops that allowed the *After Images* series to take flight.

“I had worked with Cynthia many years earlier,” Arbus recalls, “and I knew she was a fan of [actor] Alan Cumming, who is on the cover of *The Fourth Wall*. So I went over to the studio, gave her a copy of the book, and told her my vision for the new series; the rest is history.”

For Arbus, the most challenging aspect of photographically emulating the paintings on which the *After Images* series is based is how drastically her lighting technique needed to be altered in order to achieve the appropriate effect. “With *The Fourth Wall*,” she says, “I was using very dramatic lighting—theatrical, really—with bright spotlights and dark shadows. The images in the *After* series demand a much softer, almost muted form of lighting.”

“Another challenge,” she continues, “is that, sometimes, when looking at classic portraits, I realized that a lot of what painters paint on a canvas doesn’t exist in real life.” While researching which paintings she wanted to emulate for the series, Arbus spent a number of long, quiet afternoons at the Strand bookstore in New York City, where, as she says, she became “kind of obsessed” with Picasso and, in particular, his Blue Period. “Obviously,” Arbus says, “Picasso took certain liberties, but one thing I noticed immediately is that women’s fingers just aren’t as long as Picasso tended to paint them; the perspective was skewed. So there were a lot of little things we discovered along the way that made the process more challenging, but also more exciting.”

The process itself is as detailed and involved as it is time-consuming—“like making a film,” Arbus says—and its execution depends not only on Arbus’s immeasurable skills as a photographer, but also on the work of everyone else involved, including Altoriso, the project’s chief stylist; makeup artist Jerry Lopez; the actors (Pittu and Samantha Soule) and dancer (Nina Goldman), who serve as the subjects of the photographs (many of whom Arbus met while working on *The Fourth Wall*); a number of lighting assistants (Jordan Seiler, Peter Baiaamonte, Owen Hope, Adam Leon, and Johnny Fogg); and the painter Ian Vens.

“When we started,” Arbus explains, “I was discouraged by how contemporary a lot of the props looked, and at one point, David [Pittu] said, ‘Why don’t we just paint the props? Age them, make them look the way they did when they were painted.’ So we started painting the props, and it just clicked. It was perfect.”

Quickly, the idea blossomed, and before long, Jerry and Ian were painting the subjects of the images themselves—their faces, their bodies, their clothes and shoes, everything—and with Arbus behind the lens, tweaking the light and shadow and color, the images came alive.

So far, Arbus has shot over sixty images for the series, including works by Picasso, Modigliani, Schiele, Cézanne, and Ingres, to name a few. “The more I do it,” she says, “the more the photographs depart from their original painted forms. Another thing I never predicted is that, to me, at least one element in each photograph looks real, while everything else looks painted.”

She describes the images as being a “kind of an illusion,” explaining that the subjects of the photographs either pop out or recede based on how painted they are. “I’m in love with the single image,” Arbus says. “I always have been, and always will be. This series is an obsession for me. It’s like falling in love. It challenges me, excites me, and gives me pleasure. I don’t want it to ever end.”



SAM/AFTER ARMS CROSSED, NYC, 2012 PHOTO ©AMY ARBUS





**THIS SUMMER**, from June 29 to July 18 at the Schoolhouse Gallery, will mark Amy Arbus's twenty-second solo exhibit. Arbus herself will be busy—traveling to Oslo to photograph the annual Ibsen festival, for one thing—but if you happen to find yourself on the tip of Cape Cod, on one of those perfectly balmy Provincetown summer days, where the breeze gently guides you along the beach and over the dunes, through the bright, vibrant streets, the Schoolhouse Gallery is where you want to end up. Because there, inside, you'll find the latest series from a truly gifted photographer, whose work is as daring as it is bold, as imaginative as it is wholly and effortlessly unique.

"I'm always thrilled to show my photographs in Provincetown," Arbus says brightly, "because people there know my work, and they always seem to respond to it. We're kindred spirits, I suppose, Provincetown and me. It's one of my favorite places on earth."

When asked what she sees as the ultimate goal for the *After Images* series, Arbus is pensive. "At this stage in my life and in my career, I'm ready for a big show in New York City, which has somehow eluded me lately." She pauses. "And of course, there's always a book." ▲

MATTHEW B. BIEDLINGMAIER is the Founder and Editor in Chief of the New Professional ([www.tnpgmag.com](http://www.tnpgmag.com)), a literary magazine based in Washington, DC.

TWO HEDWIGS/HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH, EDINBURGH, 2005  
PHOTO © AMY ARBUS

## Congratulations to CARMEN CICERO

On This Much-Deserved Recognition by the Provincetown Art Association and Museum



June Kelly Gallery

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# The Magical Atmosphere

## CARMEN CICERO AT WORK

By Elise Kaufman

**M**Y FIRST MEETING with the artist and jazz musician Carmen Cicero was at his spacious loft in lower Manhattan in the winter of 2010, in advance of his first solo exhibition in Provincetown in over a decade. His professional and personal relationship to the Outer Cape (he splits his time between NYC and his home in Truro) reflects a continuation of artistic reciprocity and tradition, which has existed for many years between the New York City art universe and the Provincetown/Truro environs. The space in lower Manhattan, where he has lived and worked with art historian Mary Abell since the early '70s, was, until quite recently, NYC's skid row. In the world of ever-evolving New York City real estate, this neighborhood ("LES" = "Lower East Side") is now another vortex where the young and the hip, and those with an interest in current art trends, meet and greet at new restaurants, bars, and luxury housing to experience the currency of contemporary art (the New Museum is across the street and numerous galleries are sprinkled in and around the immediate neighborhood). Cicero showed me the vast range of his work (paintings on canvas, watercolors, gouaches, drawings) and discussed his fifty-plus years of art making, as well as his career as an accomplished saxophonist.

A happy result of the Shore Galleries show in Provincetown (summer 2011) is a renewed exhibition schedule both in New York City and on the Outer Cape; a painting was included at the Guggenheim Museum exhibition titled *Art of Another Kind* this past June, and there are two exhibitions in Provincetown this year (one celebrating twenty years of paintings at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, which opened in May, and another exhibition of works on paper at Shore Galleries in August). These shows, in addition to a monograph of his work published by Schiffer Publishing (with an essay by Phyllis Braff and an interview with Deborah Forman), to be released in 2013, keep him lively. As we discussed his life and work, it became utterly clear that Carmen Cicero has been ahead of the curve in art making, not to mention real-estate trends, for decades.

His early forays into painting grew out of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, and he employed the gestural signatures that characterized that style then: sweeping, abstract, painterly brushstrokes; emotive color; and grandly scaled canvases. But Cicero could never fully relinquish or abandon his interest in the figure or in representation, predating the trend toward abstract figuration in the 1980s by a good twenty years. He recollected that his peers' response



COLLINS ROAD, 2011, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 30 BY 40 INCHES

was one of bafflement and notes fifty years later that the paintings now look "very ordinary." Reflecting now on the full arc of his studio enterprise, he has self-catalogued his work into two distinct, but related genres: Figurative Expressionism and what he refers to as his "Visionary" paintings (it is his Visionary work that is exhibited at the PAAM).

Although both of these outwardly disparate studio enterprises are fueled by a combination of the unconscious and art historical—in addition to personal and literary references—the processes are quite distinct and require that Cicero draw upon a wide range of studio traditions. One such figuratively abstract painting (originally done in the 1970s and titled *The Surprise at the Window*), which had been recently revisited and reworked prior to our meeting, rested against Cicero's studio wall the day I visited. It was large, about six feet square, and included three figures on the left facing a window. They seem startled by the appearance of a rather spectral-like, predatory figure in black, outlined in a ghostly pale white, staring toward them across the plane of the picture. The space is shallow, almost theatrical, and the colors are acidic and glowing. The mark-making is energetic and emotionally charged: a direct

outgrowth of Cicero's kinship with Abstract Expressionism. The process, Cicero told me, began with a spontaneous response to the white field of the canvas itself, and he described to me the excitement of never knowing in advance what he'll paint or where he might begin on that vastness of primed white. The emotional and psychological aspects of Cicero's inner world is made visually manifest, revealed through direct spontaneous response to the canvas, in which the painting process is the communicator; the magic for him is in the mystery of sudden inspiration. In these paintings, he is merely the conduit for his inner information and interests. The Surrealist automatic writings and musings of Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, and the Symbolist Antonin Artaud are cited (although he's careful to emphatically distinguish and articulate the differences between his sensibility and those of the Surrealists as a movement or group). The commonality between the Surrealist sensibility and Cicero is the shared belief that a work's honesty is the degree to which the unconscious is made visually manifest and articulated.

The process of inspiration for his Visionary work differs significantly from the Expressionistic paintings. In the former, reflex and instantaneous response





TALES FROM THE TRURO WOODS, 2011, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 30 BY 40 INCHES

generates or launches the imagery and the space. In the latter, Cicero employs a quieter and more contained approach. He quotes a Wordsworth poem to explain this method of inspiration; he looks toward his “inner eye of solitude” to source the isolated and sometimes disparate images that characterize this group of work. Here, the elements of inspiration appear to Cicero while he is at rest: they make their appearances in that twilight state in-between consciousness and sleep. We see this blurring of day and night in several recurring motifs, in particular his deep fascination with and love for the nighttime mysteries of Truro. While the boundaries between night and day are blurred in the urban universe of New York City, the nighttime in Truro exists as a more distinct shift in consciousness, reluctant to reveal itself fully and absolutely. Cicero paints the “strange things in the night,” where absence, loneliness, and mystery are prominent players; he finds inspiration for this in the Cape landscape: moonlit lands, quiet roads, and poetic nocturne. Several paintings included in the PAAM show exemplify this. In *Night Flight* (2009), a large bird in a thick snowfall, centrally located in the composition, is depicted at the instant of perfect balance necessary for it to take flight. It’s a bird more likely to be at home in the tropics than in the snow-covered backwoods of Truro, and the palette range of warm gray conveys palpable softness and quiet, yet the imagery is disparate. An unmistakable and insistent sensation of anxious peril persists. Something is amiss in this particular natural world. We are invited and instructed to consider the possibility of discord, exercising caution and reflection in the process.

The suggestion of danger and discomfort also characterizes two other recent paintings, which share with *Night Flight* a strong influence of the

French Symbolist Henri Rousseau: *Collins Road* (2011) and *Tales from the Truro Woods* (2011). Cicero, in each of these paintings, responds to the unique personality of the landscape immediately surrounding him in Massachusetts. His homage to Rousseau is in evidence in the depiction and embrace of the wild and unpredictable sensuality of nature: the lacey quality of the trees in silhouette, and the repetitive, tapestry-like pattern of the woodland and the snow as it falls gently upon the ground. And although the figure in *Tales* is human in form, (she) is painted so similarly to the trees that it begs the question: to what extent is she reliably human? In form only, perhaps, for she is indeed a creature of the forest and exists in a dreamlike duality.

The eyes of the massive bird in *Collins Road*, modeled after an African eagle (a bird known for its extreme ferocity), and the central female nude in *Tales from the Truro Woods* engage and confront the viewer’s gaze directly, head-on, fearlessly daring us to stay, and encouraging us to enquire: have we stumbled upon something that has only just occurred or are we being called upon to bear witness to some unnamed circumstance, which is vaguely threatening and certainly unsettling—or even to tarry a bit longer (despite, perhaps, our best and most sensible interests) and participate in the act to come? In Cicero’s work, the bystander isn’t allowed to be passive, but rather is forced to recognize the potential for, and risks of, collusion. The contrast between light and dark in *Collins Road* and *Tales from the Truro Woods* underscores that the choices laid before us are stark through their contrast. The power of Cicero’s vision is that we are sufficiently seduced to fool ourselves into thinking that either option we choose to take will be a safe one.

In my most recent conversation with Cicero, I asked him to reflect upon the upcoming exhibitions. He stated simply that it was great to see an exhibition of these pieces of work, which signify the last twenty years of his studio work life. He reflected that making these paintings required that he draw “upon all of my artistry, intelligence, and judgment.” Regarding the book, he added that it will be “extremely satisfying” to be able to see the entire range and trajectory of the scope of work formatted so that the audience can turn the pages and view it in its entirety. Crucial to Cicero is that both the exhibitions and the publication reflect precisely the ethos of the “honesty of the work” and its lack of contrivance.

Regardless of whether Cicero paints, draws, or plays his sax, he always seeks the “perfect, the sublime, the ‘magical atmosphere.’” The honesty. The artistic references from which he derives inspiration and pleasure are diverse indeed: Da Vinci, Monet, and Hopper; Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jacob Ruisdael; saxophonist Stan Getz and pianist Kenny Barron; Herman Melville, Thomas Hardy, and James Joyce; and the list continues. When asked to comment upon the commonality between these giants of painting, music, and literature, Cicero remarked that “it is that they all achieve that magical spell. . . . When a musician is grooving, really locked in, it creates an atmosphere . . . the tempo is at breakneck speed and you feel like you’re sailing and it’s that magical spell.”

I remember that the windows of the loft were open during that first meeting and I vividly recall the sights (and sounds). The outdoor, urban street noise floated in—replete with horns honking, shouting voices, and urgent sirens wailing. Cicero had put some jazz on his hi-fi set (procured from a collector who made a barter arrangement with him) and this symphonic cacophony of urban, disparate voices mixed with that singularly urban music form. I looked at paintings that he was readying for an upcoming exhibition at the June Kelly Gallery in Soho: rural landscapes of the summer woods of Truro and the same woods, lush in their snowiness, in a winter scene. The trees are all dark silhouettes against the sky and their leaves are like black lace. The snowflakes fall soft and silent in this scene of solitude, and I thought to myself that the “Magical Spell,” that magical atmosphere of Cicero’s unconscious, was grooving on the canvas.

He can still hear the beat, the melody, and the harmony—all at once and together. Up-tempo, of course. ▲

ELISE KAUFMAN is an artist living and working in New York City and on the Outer Cape. Her work is held in numerous public and private collections, and her drawings have been exhibited in the United States and Europe. Her last solo exhibition was at Shore Galleries, Provincetown. Examples of her work and her full credentials may be seen at [www.elisekaufman.net](http://www.elisekaufman.net).





# Roy Staab

## MEANDERING MOMENT

By Will Walker

MEANDERING MOMENT, WEST END REED CONSTRUCTION PHOTO BY KRISTIN LONG

**W**ALKING ALONG THE edge of the marsh in the West End of Provincetown, I return to the sidewalk by the turnaround just in time to pass a man carrying a bundle of reeds on his shoulder, and before I know it I'm asking him if he's the one who makes the reed constructions that appear in the shallow water near the shore for a brief moment in summer.

"Yes, that's me," he says, and continues on his way with his bundle.

The next day I'm away, and miss the actual building. What I know is that it happens quickly, and without fanfare. I have a sense from prior years of what will blossom, but more than that I have a sense of the primal anticipation that accompanies this occurrence.

The day after, I pass by on foot again, at low tide.

Along the tidal basin of the moors, I see a circular reed palace, interlocking and simple, yet hard to discern when standing by it, a form where once there was only air, by a marsh that is in itself glorious and filled with a primal mystery.

I debate a moment and then step over the line of retaining reeds connecting the individual upright spears, to feel what it might be like to breathe inside such artifice. Then I step out of the little enclave of wisps bending in the slight breeze and climb up to the pavement.

A couple nearby is glancing at the reeds. The guy says he thinks it's a fish weir, or something Indian. I tell them it's constructed, that it's not a weir or anything Indian, like I'm an authority, or like my explanation somehow has more currency—since it's

based in some slight knowledge of fact—than the speculation, which has a certain metaphorical truth. This does look like a weir. Perhaps it's a spirit weir. Perhaps part of its fascination is the suggestion of a Native American aesthetic of simplicity and—for lack of a less-loaded word—grace. Also, a connection to the natural world.

And there's the impermanence. As if this construct has consciously embodied evanescence. Here today, gone tomorrow. Who is it who said, "Man is a thinking reed"? Pascal?

Something has happened. I feel part of a community. Though perhaps that's too organizational a word. Is it a fellowship? Is it just the part of life that happens between the ears, where one builds castles in the sky and watches them billow while walking through town, avoiding the delivery trucks and the strollers and the bicyclers and paying special attention to the uneven footing?

Is it trivial to say this construction is fun? That it's exciting? That it's memorable and filled with surprises? That finding out who made it seems important and worthwhile?

Should I pretend to be a critic? What is a critic anyway? Maybe I should tell a Zen story, the one about the professor who travels to Japan to encounter Zen and visits a master who pours him tea, not stopping when the cup is full, shocking the professor, getting his attention, and then saying, "To study Zen, first you must empty the cup." Beginner's mind: useful concept or simply a dodge justifying ignorance? Maybe a little of both?

Or maybe I'll trot out the probably apocryphal story of Leonardo, who, when approached

by an envoy from some powerful prince or other, inscribed a perfect freehand circle on a piece of paper as proof of his mastery. The perfect freehand circle, of course, is gone, but I can picture it, and more importantly picture the moment of Leonardo inscribing it. Questions abound, but the story suggests something of the simple, compelling scope of this fragile circle of reeds.

Part of what keeps me enthralled—Is that a good word? Doesn't it suggest bondage? Is that appropriate?—is the lack of commentary. My brain may be sparking itself into other dimensions, but the reeds are impervious. I may be uncomfortably confronting all sorts of questions about my relationship to this construct, but it is going about its business, which is, ultimately, to disappear, to indicate a sketch in the air, to be like the ripple in a pond after the stone is thrown, to obey the laws of physics and gravity and fluid dynamics and rock with the forces of wind and wave, to exist for a brief time at the edge of a marsh.

To exist.

In the next couple of days, I glean a few actual facts. The artist's name is Roy Staab. He's calling his reeds *Meandering Moment*. And, most importantly, he's planning to return.

Can't wait till next year. 🐠

*WILL WALKER (the nephew of Hudson Walker and the cousin of Berta Walker) has spent summers in Provincetown since the early fifties. His most recent book of poetry, Wednesday after Lunch, was published in 2009 by 1st World Publishing. He lives in San Francisco with his wife and dog.*



# Lightspeed

## AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCIS OLSCHAFSKIE

By Raymond Elman

**F**RANCIS OLSCHAFSKIE HAS been called the most mysterious man on the Outer Cape. I first met Francis in the 1970s, by the side of his artist-wife Anna Poor at various art exhibits, parties, and beaches. It wasn't until I saw a beautiful large-scale Olschafskie photograph on display at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum that I even realized Francis was an artist. But I didn't truly get to know the multifaceted Mr. Olschafskie until 1988, when, as cofounder of *Provincetown Arts*, I was moving the magazine into the digital age. Up through 1987, *Provincetown Arts* had used traditional paste-up techniques to prepare the magazine for print. In 1988, we used the first version of PageMaker to lay out the magazine. We needed a laser printer (very expensive in those days) to proof pages, and I didn't know which one to buy. Someone said to me, "Ask Francis, he knows something about that." As I soon learned, Francis was one of the inventor-pioneers of the computer graphics industry, and he did indeed provide advice on laser printers, with a lot more advice to follow. I immediately made Francis my digital guru, and we have been collaborating in the digital universe ever since. His latest creation, Read and Note ([www.readandnote.com](http://www.readandnote.com)), is the world's most advanced reading, organization, annotation, and collaboration platform. It is cloud-based and works on computers, the iPad, and other tablets. Read and Note's early engagements have been with the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, Cambridge University Press, and the Museum of Modern Art.

**RAYMOND ELMAN** *Francis, I've known you for a long time as someone who is successful in two areas that many people would consider to be divergent—fine-arts photographer and computer industry pioneer. What kind of environment produced such a dichotomy?*

**FRANCIS OLSCHAFSKIE** I grew up in northern Connecticut in a farming community called Thompsonville, which is now incorporated into a better-known town called Enfield. The area had an early industrial history as well. There was a Bigelow rug manufacturing plant, where many of my relatives worked.

**RE** *What did your parents do?*

**FO** My father was town manager for much of his early career. After that he ran an insurance agency. We lived in a nonaffluent farming community and people would sometimes pay my father's bills with chickens or goats. He would bring these animals home, and they would run around in our backyard. I don't remember being told to kill the chickens for dinner, but we did have great omelets.

**RE** *Looking back on growing up in this rural farming community, can you identify any activities or people that might have inspired or influenced you to become a fine-arts photographer or a pioneer in the computer industry?*

**FO** I was never really exposed to art as a child. The only art I ever saw was in the Catholic Church. I found the Church to be an aesthetic refuge. To this day, when I go into a church, it's not necessarily to participate in a religious event; it's more for the aesthetic

experience. I had a different experience when my father took me to his office, which was filled with various kinds of business machines. I remember playing with mechanical calculators that were the size of a suitcase, with lots of switches and a large lever. He had a big check-writing machine, and my dad and I used to fool around with it, writing each other thousand-dollar checks. Those machines affected me, which I wrote about in my thesis for graduate school.

**RE** *I remember the old Friden calculators that were mechanical, not digital. I remember setting levers for each decimal in a number, pulling a bigger lever to enter each number, then watching the machine vibrate as it calculated, making a loud kachung, kachung, kachung sound.*

**FO** Exactly. That was great fun for me as a kid. My father died in 1961, when I was twelve, and my mother took over his business. I was sent away to a Catholic boarding school. Then I went to business school for only two years, because I was struggling with what I really wanted to do with my life, balanced with my father's legacy and what my family wanted me to do. I was also struggling with the changing culture of the 1960s, the Vietnam War and the military draft, and all the other things that were going on at the time.

But at the same time, I was really interested in pictures. Like a lot of photographers of my generation, I grew up looking at the big picture magazines like *LIFE* and *Look*, which shaped our world of information, and also shaped the way I saw the world. And I can clearly remember seeing Eugene Smith's pictures in *LIFE* magazine. I remember the series on the country doctor, which is one of my favorites.



IN FRANCE, FRANCIS OLSCHAFSKIE AT THE DAGUERRE DIORAMA RESTORATION IN BRY-SUR-MARNE

The series on Albert Schweitzer in Africa. The Walker Evans WPA photographs. And to this day, I can still see those pictures in *LIFE* that made me want to be a photographer.

So I started taking pictures. I built my own little darkroom in my closet and I started to manipulate images, trying to emulate Imogen Cunningham. I remember that, instead of putting her photographic paper in a tray with chemicals, she would use a spray bottle and spray developer on the paper. I read about such things in photography magazines, and I became interested in what other photographers were doing.

In 1969, I left college, and I was drafted into the military. They asked me what I did, and I told them I was a photographer. Luckily, that's what they assigned me to do. I got to do a lot of photography during my two years in the army, and met other photographers as well. The army actually propelled me toward a career as a photographer, so when I got out of the army I went home and told my family that even though I had tried to help out with the family business, and I didn't want to abandon the family, it was not in me to be a businessman. I couldn't run the insurance agency that my father left me. I said that I was going to go to an art school. My mother said, "Well, you're completely out of your mind, so best of luck." I visited a variety of art schools, like RISD, the Philadelphia Art Institute, Rochester Institute of Technology, and I ended up at MassArt [Massachusetts College of Art and Design], where I met like-minded people and had a fantastic experience. When I got out of MassArt, I was invited to participate in what is now called the "Media Lab" at MIT, which was a place for interdisciplinary people.

**RE** *How did the Media Lab come to your attention?*

**FO** While I was at MassArt, I was lucky to meet Minor White and spend some time with him. Minor White ran the photography program at MIT, and I also got to know his assistant, Jonathan Green, who eventually took over the photography department after Minor's death. When I was looking to go to graduate school, Jonathan had taken over the photography program at Ohio State, and he



offered me a full scholarship and stipend, but I didn't want to live in Ohio. Jonathan did say to me, however, that there was a program at MIT that would be very interested in the kind of work I was doing. I didn't really follow his advice, but, as it turns out, someone had mentioned me to Muriel Cooper, who was head of the Visible Language Workshop, which was part of the Media Lab. Muriel was a graphic designer, and she told me that she had noticed my work being exhibited around Boston. At the time, I was the director of a small art school in Boston called "Project Art Center," and one day I received a call from Muriel, who said, "I hear you are looking to go to graduate school, and I think you should come over to MIT and talk with me." So I did. The Media Lab had every type of imaging machine one could imagine, and I was told that I could use all the equipment and do anything I wanted. They had a Heidelberg press, and fifth-generation electrostatic laser typesetters, and the first electrostatic camera, called the Haloid. There was a large (say twenty by twenty foot) room, enclosed in glass and cooled to a low temperature, which contained a computer that was capable of manipulating images. I thought, "This is where I should be."

**RE** How did you deal with the dichotomy of studying in a science-oriented university, while making fine-arts photography? Did you become a bridge between the two worlds? Is there so much science in photography that there is a natural overlap?

**FO** I was very intrigued early on by how an understanding of the science of photography can be used to manipulate photographs. It became clear and very obvious to me that I could really refine my images in an extremely unique way by manipulating the chemistry of photography and manipulating the process. And eventually, my understanding and manipulation of the science became more of an



UNTITLED DIPTYCH, 2009, PHOTOGRAPH, 24 BY 40 INCHES  
(LEFT TO RIGHT) EGYPTIAN HAND DRAWING, LONDON; HAND IN WATER, LONDON

aesthetic statement, where I would manipulate until the process was broken. One of my biggest influences, whom I was able to meet and spend time with, was Emmet Gowin, a great American photographer who has directed the photography department at Princeton for the past twenty-five years. Emmet was already doing what I wanted to do, using the chemistry of photography to enhance and refine the image to the extreme. Emmet was the one who turned me on to mixing my own developer, and he showed me how to manipulate my images by expanding the experience of creating the actual object.

This connected for me with what Minor White talked about regarding being a part of the process of making a photograph. Minor used to recommend a little exercise in which you would find a place where you wanted to take a picture in the sun, and lie down

in front of a camera in the sun, and feel the light, be part of the moment in the light. People may chuckle at those types of exercises today, but I did those types of things. At the time, it was a really unique way to connect with what you were photographing. On the other side of the process, Emmet would dilute his developer to the point where it took an hour to develop a print, which would expand the range of tone that you could get out of a piece of paper. I experimented with that process as well, to the point where I would leave a piece of photographic paper in developer overnight and come back the next morning, hoping to get as much tonal range as possible.

**RE** Some photographers prefer to only print what they capture with the camera without any manipulation, while at the other end of the spectrum there are photographers who are deeply engaged in the scientific process of photography, and regard the whole process as part of the experience of making art. How many other photographers were among the group that you were working with at MIT?

**FO** I was the only one in the department. The rest of the department was made up of graphic designers, a filmmaker, a sculptor, some painters, and a couple of engineers. The point was to have an interdisciplinary program. The glue that held us all together was experimentation. Even though our backgrounds were in different disciplines, we would all sit around and critique each other's work, just like in any graduate art program.

**RE** So how did you go from being at MIT with a photography focus to creating Lightspeed computers?

**FO** You may be surprised to learn that in the beginning, Lightspeed, for me, was really about making art. The question of science and art is not a question of either-or. Science has been a big part of making art since inception. What came first, science or art? Stephen Wilson explores the relationship in his book *Information Arts: Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology*. Artists always confront



UNTITLED DIPTYCH, 2008, PHOTOGRAPH, 34 BY 50 INCHES  
(LEFT TO RIGHT) ALBINO SNAKE, OXFORD UNIVERSITY; CHARLES BABBAGE'S BRAIN, LONDON. BABBAGE IS THE FATHER OF MODERN COMPUTING.





UNTITLED, 2010, PHOTOGRAPH, 24 BY 18 INCHES  
IMAGE OF "ALICE LIDDELL" BY CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON (LEWIS CARROLL) WITH REFLECTION, OXFORD UNIVERSITY

this issue. They have to become seekers of technical knowledge to expand their art form. Daguerre, a painter who used technology to expand his paintings, winds up being the inventor of photography. Even for the Abstract Expressionists, it wasn't just about what they were looking at; it was also about something else, like the chemistry of paint or the manipulation of the process.

For example, looking at Morris Louis's paintings, they weren't necessarily painted from the front, they were painted from behind. He experimented with and understood what happened when he applied paint to the back of a raw canvas and the paint seeped through to the front. Jackson Pollock was dealing with the space between the brush and the canvas that couldn't be captured. The painting was the end result of that. When I got out of graduate school, I had no way of making pictures with computers like I had made at MIT, where I had a million-dollar computer to work with. I joined together with a group of people that were developing a computer that would enable them to continue their projects, which ultimately became the Lightspeed computer. My partner, Nathan Felde, was a graphic designer who wanted to be able to continue to do page layout electronically. I wanted to manipulate photographic images.

**RE** When you were creating Lightspeed, did you also envision creating a company that would develop Lightspeed computers for commercial purposes?

**FO** No. I just thought of it as a tool for my own purposes.

**RE** How did you acquire the knowledge to physically build a computer in the 1980s?

**FO** When we were at MIT we used very large mainframe computers, with big sixteen-inch tape drives, and the space had to be air-conditioned at all times. The computers couldn't be turned off because rebooting them was a big problem. But the times were changing rapidly. After I graduated from MIT, minicomputers were starting to appear, and the basic elements of computers like CPUs were becoming inexpensive. There was a big push to get the minicomputer out and have it take over all of the mainframe work. The 68000 CPU, which was the basis for the Macintosh, came out as I was getting out of graduate school. When Muriel invited me to attend MIT as an artist, nobody ever told me that to graduate from MIT, I would have to take computer-programming classes and computer-science classes. So I ended up taking those classes, and electrical-engineering classes, in order to get out of the institution. But I was lucky to take those EE classes with Harold Edgerton, who was both a photographer and a scientist.

**RE** What were the dimensions of the first commercial Lightspeed computer?

**FO** It was about three feet high by one foot wide.

**RE** That was pretty small for those times. How were you able to print the images that were created on the Lightspeed?

**FO** Fortunately, my thesis in graduate school was on output, because it was challenging to print the images that I was manipulating on the computer. When I started at MIT there was no such thing as a color output device, but by the time I left there were a number of them available. And because I was a photographer, and had learned the science of how images are made, I could apply that knowledge to figuring out how to take a colored image out of a computer-graphic system and make a print. Color monitors and color CRTs at that time were like televisions, so they were curved. Not only that, but they had a shadow mask, which is the thing that breaks up the RGB [red, green, blue] projection, and I understood how RGB worked because of my backgrounds in photography and graphic arts and computer science. So I said to myself that there is a way to get computer-generated images onto paper if I can separate them into RGB. At the time, there were early versions of very flat monochrome monitors, and I was able to use a program that allowed me to separate the RGB colors of a photograph and send them as separate images to a monochrome screen. Then I took a photographic view camera and handheld pieces of acetate (colored red, or green, or blue) between one



UNTITLED, 2011, PHOTOGRAPH, 18 BY 24 INCHES  
STREET REFLECTION, LONDON



of the single-color images displayed on the monitor and the camera, and shot a picture onto color film for each of the three colors. Ultimately, that created the full-color image that I was seeing on the curved CRT.

**RE** And I assume that you simply told people that you created an image on a computer and Boom! Here it is! You didn't tell people how laborious the process was. You were the proverbial "black box."

**FO** (Laughter) Yeah. I was walking around with a portfolio of photographs that I could describe as "computer generated," long before most people.

**RE** How did Lightspeed transition from a computer workstation that you used to create your photographs into a real business?

**FO** *Communication Arts* magazine, one of the premier graphic-arts magazines, wrote an article about the work that we were doing. The owner of the publication, Richard Coyne, visited us, saw the Lightspeed workstation, and said that he would like to help bring our machine to the graphic-design community. He had the resources to fund that effort, and that's how our business got started. In the end we were able to sell our machine to many art departments and graphic-design firms.

**RE** How long did Lightspeed last?

**FO** As an ongoing enterprise with my presence, it only lasted for two or three years, because we eventually sold it.

**RE** What has been your ratio of business to art? When you were at MIT, did you think you would be building machines to solve other people's needs? Or did you think that most of your time would be devoted to fine-arts photography?

**FO** I thought that most of my time would be devoted to making art, and that was all I was interested in doing. But when you are at a place like MIT, the seed is planted in you that you can make something and propel yourself into the business world. And you can be quite successful if you can develop something new and unique. I saw people doing just that. There is a great printmaker named Ron MacNeil, who was one of my teachers. And Ron built a huge, wall-sized, ink-jet printer, funded by corporations, which rewarded him in a variety of ways. I saw a lot of people at MIT doing similar things.

**RE** Has it been a problem for you to have one foot in the art world and one foot in the business-science world? Have you felt moments of awkwardness when someone introduces you as a participant in two worlds that some would regard as incompatible?

**FO** Yes. When I won the Boston Artist Foundation photography fellowship, I was still running Lightspeed, but I partially won the award because of the work I was doing with computers. And I was thrilled to win the award. It was a major achievement. And I remember running from a Lightspeed business meeting to an Artist Foundation awards event, and I showed up wearing a three-piece suit. I ran into a couple of artist friends of mine and their reaction was, "What the hell happened to you?" I was embarrassed. I was wearing a three-piece suit at an art opening . . . and nobody else was.

**RE** What brought you to Cape Cod?

**FO** Anna Poor. I went to a party and I was telling a friend of mine that I had just seen a GREAT sculpture exhibition at MassArt. I started to describe the show, saying it was one of the best shows I had seen. The artist was named "A. Poor" and I assumed the "A" stood for Adam. Ten minutes later this BEAUTIFUL woman walks up to me and says, "I hear you want to meet 'Adam Poor.'" Then she punches me in the stomach, and says, "It's not 'Adam Poor.' It's 'Anna Poor'! and I'm Anna Poor." And that's when Anna invited me to visit her in Truro. I said, "Where's Truro?" Five hours later, two hours on the highway and three hours wandering the winding roads of Truro, I finally arrived at Anna's doorstep.



UNTITLED DIPTYCH, 2008, PHOTOGRAPH, 50 BY 34 INCHES

(TOP TO BOTTOM) THE WHITE MURKY WATERS OF THE RIVER THAMES, LONDON; LOUIS BRAILLE'S FIRST HANDMADE TOUCH BOOK, COUPVRAY, FRANCE

**RE** When I moved to Provincetown in 1970, I had no idea about the breadth and depth of the art scene. Were you aware of the scope of the art community?

**FO** No. Not at all. The only reason I knew anything about the Outer Cape art community is because of Anna. Anna comes from a family of artists, and she has been involved with the Outer Cape art scene since she was born. So she introduced me to everyone. I remember walking with Anna along Commercial Street when we encountered Raphael Soyer, in his natty suit and hat, and his wife walking toward us. Anna grew up knowing Raphael Soyer, and they start hugging and greeting each other. I'm thinking, "Oh my God, this is Raphael Soyer, one my favorite painters! I can't believe I'm here in Provincetown meeting one of the greatest painters of our time." So Anna introduces me to him, and *stupidly* I say to him, "So, are you still painting?" And he looks up at me and says, "I'm still breathing, aren't I?"

**RE** In many ways you have kept a low profile on the Cape. The people who already know you are well aware of your artwork, but are not necessarily aware of your digital career. And I am always surprised when people who should know all about you are not aware of you at all, or only have a limited view of the scope of your accomplishments. Do you consciously try to maintain a low profile?

**FO** Some of my friends have said to me, "You know, Francis, it's always a big secret with you. You never tell anybody what you're up to, and then we hear something about what you've done, and we're always surprised." Well, I have spent most of my life working really hard building technologies, building companies, and moving on. So for a long time I viewed Truro and Provincetown as a refuge—a place where I didn't have to work, especially before the advent of the Internet. I was one of those people who would go back and



between the Cape and Boston, and if I was lucky I could stay on the Cape for a week. If I was very lucky I could stay for a month. I was showing my photographs all over the world, but when I was in Provincetown, I was just there to enjoy it and not necessarily be a participant. Now that has changed because Anna and other people encouraged me to exhibit at artSTRAND. Now Cape collectors have become interested in my work, and I am surprised by that, because Provincetown is really a painting and sculpture town. Photography has never been considered an important art form in Provincetown, and I have heard other photographers say the same thing.

Conversely, by the way, most of the people I come in contact with in business know nothing about me as artist.

**RE** Over the years, you have worked with organizations, like the Daguerre Association in France and the International Center of Photography [ICP] in New York, that have leveraged your unique blend of aesthetics, art history, the history of photography, and technology.

**FO** A lot of those projects are a crossover of my being involved in technology and being involved in teaching. I have taught for over twenty-five years. A number of institutions, like the ICP, like the photography department at NYU, like the School of Visual Arts in New York, were really struggling to integrate new technologies into their photography departments, and, due to my hybrid experience, I was provided with opportunities to become involved with those institutions and help launch their digital programs.

After I had been teaching the history of technology and art for quite a number of years, someone suggested that I write a book about it. I'm not a very good writer, but I am a photographer, so I decided to make a photography book about the history of technology and art. I started looking at how photography evolved and the collateral archival material that still exists that I could photograph. I went to Europe in order to stand in the spot where Joseph Niépce made the first fixed photographic image in 1829. I made my trek to Niépce's house in the south of France, and I made a trek to Henry Fox Talbot's house; and then I started looking for Daguerre, because eventually Daguerre was considered the father of photography. The odd thing about Daguerre was that there wasn't anything of his left to be found—there was no Daguerre house, no Daguerre museum, at the time. Daguerre was foremost an artist, yet many accounts



IN FRANCE, FRANCIS OLSCHAFSKIE WAS HONORED AT THE STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS BY THE MAYOR OF BRY-SUR-MARNE FOR HIS WORK WITH THE DAGUERRE ASSOCIATION.

of Daguerre refer to him as a scientist, which I always found strange because he was trained as a painter and spent his entire life painting. He had huge successes and huge failures creating dioramas for the theater. The dioramas were transparent paintings, which burned down on a regular basis because it was the 1800s and the stage was lit by open flames. But history has had a hard time calling him an artist first, because he made such an incredible scientific breakthrough. The same might be said of me, though on a less-significant scale. And I find that somewhat offensive to artists.

Searching for material about Daguerre, I remembered a book that I read in undergraduate school, Gernsheim's biography of Daguerre, which contained a little postage-stamp image of a diorama Daguerre had made. I knew that Daguerre's paintings and daguerreotypes were around, distributed in various museums, but there were only something like seventeen daguerreotypes by Daguerre himself still in existence, and it was my understanding only three of them were signed. So I dug out Gernsheim's book and saw a reference to a diorama that still existed in a very small town called Bry-sur-Marne, which is six miles from the center of Paris.

To make a long story short, I reached out to the mayor of Bry-sur-Marne by e-mail and told him about my research. The mayor responded that yes, there was a diorama by Daguerre in a small church in Bry-sur-Marne, and I said that I wanted to photograph it. He replied, by all means do come over, and have lunch with me as well. So I fly over to Paris, and I am on the Métro to Bry-sur-Marne, when the train breaks down and all the passengers are dumped in the middle of nowhere. Now I have been to Paris many times, and I sort of know my way around, and I can speak a little French, but this situation was outside my comfort zone. Add to that, it's pouring rain. A torrential downpour. Then they cram all of us on a bus, which is headed to I don't know where, and I decide that the only thing I can do is go with the flow. The bus goes over a little bridge, and I look out the window and see a statue of Daguerre, which I recognized from the photograph that I had seen in Gernsheim's book.

So I jumped off the bus into the pouring rain. I am already an hour late for my appointment with the mayor. I make a cell call to the mayor's office, and suddenly a black SUV with tinted windows pulls up, a woman opens the door and says, "You are going to come and have lunch with the mayor?" I enter the SUV, and there is the mayor talking on his cell phone. We have a wonderful lunch and he and I become friends. He was very interested in exploiting

their connection to Daguerre for the good of the city and asked me to help. The mayor had a vision for converting Daguerre's property into a museum. When Daguerre invented the daguerreotype, he was given a stipend by the king and a large amount of land in Bry-sur-Marne, with a château on it. The château was right across the street from a church, and in his spare time, Daguerre would go over to the church and create his last diorama. When I first saw the diorama, it was in horrible shape. There were holes in it from the war. It was ripped and torn. The diorama is thirty feet wide by forty feet high and stands behind the altar. It's trompe l'oeil, painted on very thin, transparent canvas, and meant to give the illusion of a large cathedral in this very small Catholic church. It was intended to be illuminated from behind or from the front, so that there could be two different images depending on how it was lit.

Daguerre's château, which was quite large, had been turned into a hospital for children with special needs. It was a very secluded place, and they wouldn't let me go in. But the mayor wanted to explore the ideas of restoring the diorama and of creating a Daguerre museum that would be housed in the château.

So I engaged in the project with the mayor and started to help as much as I could, by creating websites, creating donation portals, and things like that. In addition, I introduced the mayor to other people in the United States, and we assisted the mayor in applying for funding and were able to get a \$500,000 grant from the Getty Foundation to help restore Daguerre's last diorama. They had to pull the diorama out of the church and erect a little building to do the work in. They hired restorers who had worked on Versailles. I put up a website and a twenty-four-hour webcam so people could watch the restoration process. The mayor was able to raise money for a new hospital for the special-needs children, and today Daguerre's château is being converted into a museum.

**RE** Speaking of museums, I heard that Varujan Boghosian recently donated one of your works to the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College.

**FO** The piece he bought and donated was a photo I made as a sort of Postmodernist view of the first daguerreotype by Daguerre. It was an homage to Daguerre, and it's fitting that Boghosian, a master of collage, chose that particular photograph so layered with history. ▲

RAYMOND ELMAN started the Outer Cape Repertory Film Society in 1971, ran the To Be Coffeehouse from 1972 to 1973, and served for many years on the board of directors of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, the Provincetown Group Gallery, and the Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater. He and Chris Busa cofounded Provincetown Arts in 1985. (Ray left the magazine in 1990, and in 1991 the magazine became a publication of the nonprofit Provincetown Arts Press.) His paintings have been widely exhibited and are included in numerous collections. His paintings of Stanley Kunitz and Alan Dugan are in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. Ray is currently serving as the President of the Board of Directors of Provincetown Arts. (See [www.raymondelman.com](http://www.raymondelman.com) for more information.)

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# Robert Smithson and I

By Peter Hutchinson

**I**N 1962 I spent the summer in Provincetown. There I met Edward Avedisian. On returning to New York, Edward introduced me to Bob. It was before he married Nancy Holt, and he lived in a very small apartment on the Lower East Side. I visited him there and was struck by the bathroom, which he had painted entirely black. The toilet, which had an old-fashioned water tank near the ceiling, had to be flushed by pulling on a chain. On the end of this chain, Bob had hung a small plastic skeleton. He had a great sense of humor, and his wearing black and playing other pranks like the skeleton were really indicative of his attempt to lighten difficult problems in his life. In fact, we both were not showing in Manhattan and we would spend lots of time planning how to correct this and how to write articles for magazines.

Bob was the first person I had met who had such an intense intelligence and knowledge of so many things—geology, astronomy, science in general—and an amazing literary style, dense with meaning. In fact, he tried to teach me how every single word must be carefully considered for its meaning. Of course, I never followed this, though I admired it. My writing, dare I say, was more lyrical, very quickly written and hardly ever edited, perhaps out of laziness, or, as I like to say, to save time.

After his marriage to Nancy, they moved to a large loft in lower Manhattan, where they would invite me for dinner once a week. After eating we would sit on a large couch in the living part of the loft under a mirrored ceiling talking about almost everything, Nancy contributing her bright intelligence and ideas. While discussing my (at the time) recent work with models for earthworks, which included tubes filled with crystals and plants, Nancy was the one who suggested using mold as well. She had, I believe, a history of working with animals in a previous job.

In 1963, at the short-lived but important John Daniels Gallery, run by Dan Graham, I remember what I think was the first meeting of Bob with Virginia Dwan. Soon Virginia joined our group of discussions, and we were all reading and discussing books by writers such as Robbe-Grillet (I was particularly impressed with his essays in *For a New Novel*) and Marshall McLuhan, Immanuel Velikovsky, Nathalie Sarraute, and various writers of science fiction. Bob and I together saw *Planet of the Vampires*, *The Blob*, *The Thing*, *The Fly*, and many other science fiction films. I know these writers and films influenced us all and led to my writing some fiction in that area, especially short stories. I am not sure that Bob wrote any fiction—maybe I am wrong. The recent book *Art and Science-Fiction* by Valérie Mavridorakis includes Bob's and my writings (in French).

I remember Bob taking me on a trip to New Jersey, where he was from, to search the woods for a

fire salamander. Unbelievably, he actually found one of these beautiful creatures under a pile of wet leaves. Growing up, he kept large lizards in his home, which I heard were sometimes allowed to roam around the house. Bob also kept preserved in bottles various animals of this sort. Perhaps this reminded him of entropy and of how all things decay and finally turn to dust. (Although, preserved in formaldehyde, this would take much longer.) As is known, Bob was fascinated by the idea of entropy. And it is a theory worthy of interest (or, should I say, a fact). I, on the other hand, was more involved with the opposite, the accretion of dust into planets of evolution and the fact that life is nature's riposte to entropy by increasing complexity. Of course, one could argue that inevitably everything loses organization. However, although the final fate of the universe cannot be known, Einstein noted that energy and information can never be lost. I would add that as energy slows down it becomes matter.


One day, after I had been banished to Spanish Harlem, not being able to afford lower Manhattan, a uniformed chauffeur appeared at my house on 102nd and Lexington, carried my bag to a limo, and drove me to the airport, where I boarded a plane with Christo, Bob, Dennis Oppenheim, and John Gibson, and possibly a few others, I forget. This private plane, with a champagne lunch, flew us down to Houston as the guests of John and Dominique de Menil, where we each presented ideas for a future sculpture installation in Houston. My project was a huge glass tube filled with mush from the making of paper. Bob's was a field of tar or bitumen dotted with hills of sulphur. I loved his idea although he was not so keen on mine. And his project was long before the discovery and photographs of the moon Titan. Christo proposed a pyramid of a million empty, colored oil barrels. None of these things came to pass in Houston, but I believe Christo did eventually achieve this in the Middle East, maybe Dubai.

Somehow Bob and I drifted apart, maybe partly because we were showing in different galleries, he with Dwan and I with Gibson. And also I moved to Amsterdam for almost two years.



ROBERT SMITHSON, UNTITLED, 1963, REVERSED SPRAYED CHERRY RED ON PLASTIC AND TWO SILVER PANELS, 18 BY 11 INCHES, PHOTO BY PETER DONNELLY

I remember the last time I saw Bob. We had a friendly drink at the Spring Street bar and he invited me to his loft, but unfortunately I had another appointment and said I couldn't go—not knowing, of course, of the tragic accident he would have. How I wish that I had gone with him.

Bob will always be dear in my heart and memory. I also would add that his *Spiral Jetty*, to me, is the iconic permanent earthwork. 

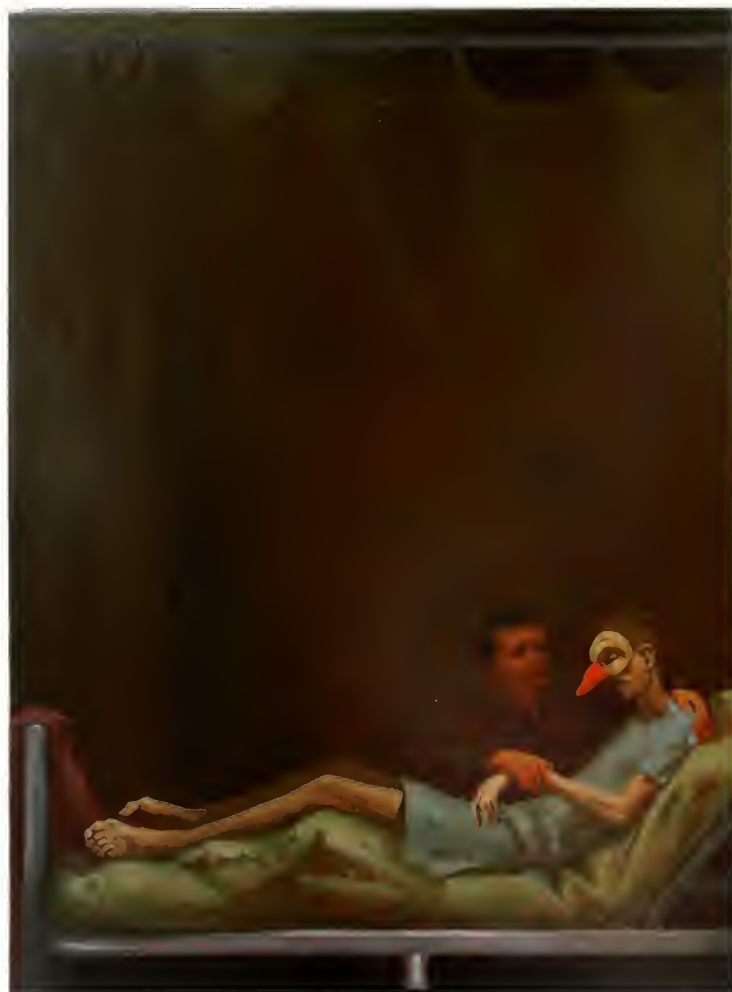
PETER HUTCHINSON was an early member of the Land Art movement and later cofounder of the Narrative Art movement of the 1970s. Like Smithson, Hutchinson wrote on the influence of science fiction on art and they often exchanged ideas on the subject. (See *Dissolving Clouds*, published by Provincetown Arts Press.) Hutchinson has been a presence in the Provincetown art community since 1962 and has resided in Provincetown full time since 1981. His work is in galleries and museums in New York and Europe and can be seen at artSTRAND gallery in Provincetown this summer.



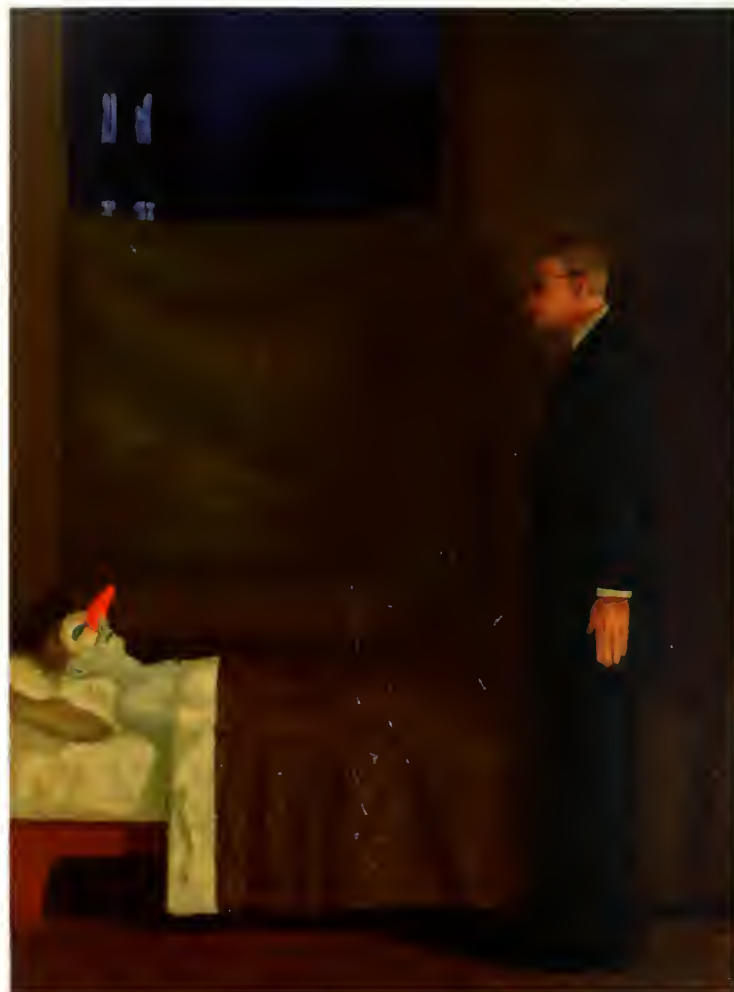
# Patrick Webb

## THE HEROIC JOURNEY OF PUNCHINELLO

By Philip Gambone



LAMENTATION OF PUNCHINELLO (BY PUNCHINELLO'S BED), 1993, OIL ON CANVAS, 78 BY 116 INCHES, COURTESY OF THE LESLIE LOHMAN MUSEUM FOR GAY AND LESBIAN ART



**T**HIS SUMMER MARKS the twentieth anniversary since Patrick Webb first unveiled, at the Provincetown Group Gallery, a series of paintings that depicted significant moments in the life of his “Everygayman,” a protagonist based on the commedia dell’arte clown Punchinello. Those paintings, which would be the first in an ongoing series that continues to this day, were, Webb says, a “really seminal” moment in his evolution as an artist. In an era when representational painting was dismissed as a dead end, Webb boldly embraced the masked, red-beaked figure, an image he “reinvented to speak for me now.”

Webb’s adoption of Punchinello was the brilliant answer to his long search for a central character in his work, a protagonist who could be a witness to and sufferer within the AIDS crisis. In a series of interviews with Webb for close to two decades, from 1992 to 2011, I was able to see firsthand the progression of this evolution, in both

his work and his life. I no longer recall the circumstances that led me to visit Webb’s studio in the summer of 1992, but I vividly recall what a strong, visceral impact his bold, arresting paintings made. “My work,” he told me on that first visit, “is a reaction to what I’ve been through. I’m searching out the dimensions of what I’ve been through.” A few months before, he had lost his lover of fourteen years to AIDS and had recently tested positive for the virus. “These paintings,” he said, “are a direct response to the anger and conflicts engendered by the AIDS epidemic.”

By that summer, Webb had already been painting professionally for more than a decade and searching for ways to legitimize the homosexual experience in his art. “My very first paintings in graduate school,” Webb told me, “were guys playing in bathtubs, guys in showers. One of my teachers commented, ‘Aren’t they a little old to be playing in bathtubs?’ I said, ‘That’s the point!’”

With its “brilliant and mordant evocations of a twentieth-century Carnival of Death,” the 1992 Group Gallery show was considered one of the most important of the season. It established the thirty-seven-year-old Webb, who had already won three National Endowment for the Arts fellowships and the Ingram Merrill Award in Painting, as “a leading painter of gay consciousness.”<sup>2</sup> As Nancy Grimes noted in her essay on his work, Webb was searching for “a visual language that would allow him to voice homosexual concerns in an unembarrassed, straightforward manner, free from cliché and sentimentality.”<sup>3</sup> But by the late 1980s, the playful eroticism of his earlier work was being challenged by what Webb calls “the tightening circle of the experience of AIDS.”

The anger and anxiety that attended the epidemic began to surface in Webb’s work. “You heard of somebody who knew somebody who had it,” he told me, “then friends started getting sick. There was



a sense of it closing down on us.” He started doing large-scale paintings that featured figures within the context of some monumental or catastrophic events: battles, fires, and parades.

But something was missing, Webb explained: “A central figure to whom all this was happening. At first I thought I’d do the self-portrait thing.” When that proved unsatisfactory, the artist looked elsewhere. In 1989, on a trip to Venice, he saw the Punchinello frescos of Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo in the Ca’ Rezzonico. Servant, trickster, rogue, and always an outsider, Punchinello was just the stand-in Webb had been looking for.

“I fell in love with him,” Webb told me. “He has this big, red phallic nose and this phallic hat. He’s an outsider. He can never belong, no matter how much he tries.” In those first Punchinello paintings, entitled *Punchinello: A Life, 1957–1990*, Webb traced his hero’s journey from birth through various adolescent rites of passage, to his sexual awakening and premature death, a figure wasted by the ravages of a disease that can easily be read as AIDS. As poet Mark Doty wrote in an essay on this exhibition, “The mask of the clown provided a kind of safe distance which allowed Webb to portray the sorrows of the AIDS epidemic with a particularly compelling gravity and grace.”<sup>4</sup>

These first Punchinello paintings placed Webb’s alter ego within a spare kind of narrative, one that inevitably led to death. “I could only paint the story of the epidemic,” he has written, “life cut short with great suffering.” Some of those first Punchinello paintings were monumental in size, up to eleven feet tall. “Those feelings were so big that I had to go big!”

While he was working on the first series, Webb’s lover, Christopher Kales, got sick. “Chris went into the hospital in the fall of 1991. That’s when he got tested. He came back positive. For the next four months, he was in and out of the hospital. There was no hope on the horizon at that point. AZT was this disgusting drug. It was too late; nothing worked. He went from one illness to another.” Kales died on January 23, 1992.

By that point, Webb, too, had tested positive, but his T-cell count was high. As the grief and shock of these events gave way to the realization that he might survive the epidemic, Webb continued to explore the possibilities of his tragic-comic hero. In the next series, four enormous, wall-sized paintings entitled *Punchinello in America*, the clown fights back: in court and in street demonstrations. And, though he is brutally lynched from a tree, in the final painting in the series Punchinello emerges victorious.

“With Chris’s death,” Webb told me, “the real question was whether Punchinello could continue. I realized he could and he should. My way of honoring Chris was to make Punchinello part of me. I was fleshing out his psyche—where these subsequent Punchinello paintings were going was where I was going in my psyche. I saw that Punchinello was going to fight on, he was going to live, he was going to be victorious.”

**FOR MY MOST** recent interview with Webb, I met him in the living room of his Manhattan apartment, where we sat surrounded by several

of his more-recent Punchinello paintings. (The oeuvre numbers in the hundreds now, many of them in important private collections.) On one wall, Punchinello straddled a weight-lifting machine; in another, he was walking the streets of Manhattan, passersby oblivious to his quirky red nose; in a third, he was lounging on the beach.

Throughout the nineties, Webb explained to me, he continued drawing on his own life for subject matter for the ongoing Punchinello series. A trip to West Texas resulted in a large series of sequential narrative canvases called *Punchinello Goes West, 1995*. Another series, *Punchinello Works Out*, finds him in a subterranean New York gym, where Punchinello strains to do his best, physically and mentally, in a room full of buff, “worked-out” men.

“Each painting explores different aspects of his adventure,” Webb wrote in a catalogue statement that accompanied the debut of this series, “from the expulsion of the weak, through the fractures of rebuilding, to intimate moments of assistance. His journey is one that parallels those of the outside world, but here amidst these brutal machines, in this dark cavern, his corporality and vulnerability are heightened.”<sup>5</sup>

“I was fascinated by the fun of looking and being looked at,” Webb told me. But he quickly learned that not everyone thought it was fun. “I got vitriolic responses to the card I sent out, where people wrote me to say, ‘Don’t ever send me another card like this.’ Those kinds of paintings trigger all sorts of body issues. They have psychic weight. They can’t remain on the wall and become anonymous. That’s why abstract painting is such a perfect vehicle for the corporate world. It’s never going to upset the horses. A big piece of red in an abstract painting is never going to upset someone the way a penis will,

or two men looking at each other, or Punchinello with his big red nose.”

The coupling of erotic attraction and menace is undeniable in Webb’s series *Punchinello and the Law*, from 1998 to 2000, where a mustachioed, unsmiling policeman walks the beat past Punchinello, who tries his best to mind his own business.

“When I say that Punchinello’s journey is my journey,” Webb explained, “I don’t only mean *actually* what’s happened to me, but my fantasies about what might happen, and could have happened, and might want to happen. If you look at his character as it develops, you’ll see that I’m fleshing out a psyche of Punchinello. Where he goes is where I’m going in my psyche. . . . I don’t think there will ever be a painting by me that won’t have some level of anxiety or darkness in it about anything. I always feel as if I’m putting my heart on the sleeve of my work—always playing out my fears and my fantasies.”

Our conversation turned to the question of what, in particular, constitutes gay painting. I mentioned to Webb that gay artist David Hockney once declared that there is no such thing as gay art, and asked for his response.

“Let me turn the question around: Is James Merrill a gay poet? Yeah. Is Cavafy a gay poet? Yeah. So why isn’t there a ‘gay painter’? It all goes back to the idea of the outsider. You can find things in Rauschenberg and Johns [painters who are homosexual] that you won’t find in de Kooning and Pollock. Proust is a different kind of writer than Dostoevsky or Tolstoy. Hockney’s illustrations to poems by Cavafy could only have been drawn by a gay man.”

For the rest of our afternoon together, Webb would comfortably reference artists, writers, poets,



PUNCHINELLO WORKS OUT (VANQUISHED), 1996–1997, OIL ON CANVAS, 44 BY 56 INCHES



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and philosophers, a testimony to the rich literary milieu in which he grew up.

**WEBB'S MOTHER** was a painter and sculptor; his father a partner at Noonday Press. Webb attended Shady Hill, a private elementary school in Cambridge, which, he says, was "one of the most incredible educational experiences in my life." Thrown in with a "precocious bunch of kids," he excelled in creative projects. "My entire childhood was filled with making things." Early on at Shady Hill, his talent for painting was recognized and encouraged.

Webb's parents counted among their friends many of the intellectual elite of New York, people like Richard Hofstadter, Irving Howe, and Alfred Kazin, who observed Webb's puppet shows and improvisational plays. "It was the kind of childhood that kids who come from intellectual families have. We were always going to the opera, museums. When I was twelve, my parents took me to a show of paintings by Giorgio Morandi at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. That was the beginning for me. From then on I thought of myself as an artist."

As part of the family's intellectual crowd, Webb's parents had several gay friends. "I was aware of them as gay. My parents saw them as something of a tragic situation. They saw how hard life was for gay people. When I eventually came out to my parents, their initial reaction was, 'Oh, my God, what an awful life you're going to have!'" But they went on to welcome Chris and then Brian, Webb's husband, into their lives.

After Shady Hill, Webb went on to Putney, a progressive private school in Vermont with a strong emphasis on the arts. "I was a late bloomer there," he remembered. "I was often chastised for not being hip enough. It's one reason, I think, why a lot of gay people go into the arts: we have this outsider experience that triggers a kind of self-reflection and contemplation of the world. What I'm struck with when I talk to straight men—less so with women—is that they didn't have those moments of self-doubt."

Webb said that his decision to enroll in the Maryland Institute College of Art "chagrined" his father: "I completely immersed myself in painting." His education consisted of lots of copying of paintings by the masters, a "dialogue with past painting, learning how to construct a painting from the ground up." He called his intense focus on his studies (he graduated in three years) "the best case of sublimation. I hadn't had sex with a boy yet—wanted to!—but I didn't want to be gay. There was one teacher I knew who was gay, but he was so over the top, I didn't want to be like that. There were no models I could imagine myself as."

Following graduation, he returned to Cambridge, where he lived with his parents, continued painting, and began making forays into Boston's emerging gay community, particularly the gay dances at MIT, large, popular events in the late seventies. He spent the next summer at Skowhegan, a prestigious summer-residency program for the visual arts in Maine. In the fall of 1977, Webb enrolled in the MFA program at Yale. It was a heady time for



PUNCHINELLO AND THE LAW (CONTRA NATURUM), 2000, OIL ON LINEN,  
60 BY 30 INCHES

him, full of intellectual stimulation as well as further advancement of his painting technique. Then he "came out big time" at Yale. "I couldn't do the closet thing, having sex on the side."

During teaching gigs at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and Cornell, Webb began to show his work in solo and group shows. He remembers that some students at one exhibition showed outright hostility to the paintings, calling them "fag work." As to his work being pegged as "gay art," Webb said that such an identification is one of several contexts that his paintings exist in: "If people are limited to categorizing you, and therefore dismissing you, there is not much I can do about that. It's easier to look at art and pigeonhole it, than to really experience it."

Is there always eroticism going on in his work? "Oh, I hope so! I hope even when I'm painting a landscape."

While Webb noted that his landscape painting is "not central to my work," in recent years he has been turning out small landscapes of the beaches and country lanes in Wellfleet, a return to a motif he had rejected as a young painter.

"I could not step out of the shadows of the artists I admire and who paint the beaches of Wellfleet—John Frazier, Paul Resika, and Edwin Dickinson," he explained. But over the past few summers, he has started visiting Wellfleet again, returns occasioned by the death of his father and the physical decline of his mother. These stays prompted him "to think about landscape a little



differently—rather than landscape as motif, landscape as narrative genesis.” As he painted the “views that I had always painted,” he became aware of how this time those scenes were steeped with memory as well: “the view I had sailed as a kid, the beach I’d walked with my dad, that I’d walked with Chris, with Brian.”

That sense of “physicality and disappearance” imbues another series of landscapes that Webb has embarked on, his night paintings. In this series, exhibited for the first time last summer at the Julie Heller Gallery East in Provincetown, Webb explores the world of “dark darks that echo the Tenebrist paintings I love so from the Baroque.” The paintings depict people gathered around nocturnal, seaside bonfires. In several, Webb’s peripatetic Punchinello is, in Webb’s words, “telling stories, gathering his family, and repeatedly disrobing and unmasking to loll around with naked men and other Punchinelli.”<sup>6</sup>

Webb told me that night painting “just started happening,” the result, in part, of his studying Titian’s late paintings. “A lot of those Titians are night paintings,” he noted. “There was something about his sense of form emerging out of the night, of physicality and disappearance. The feeling that you could paint this world and it would have this double quality of being both known and unknown. And so I started the first of these paintings—a bacchanal of Punchinelli around a fire.”

At first, Webb said, he didn’t really understand how to paint firelight on flesh in a nighttime setting. Equipping himself with a spelunking light and a pochade, he went down to the beach, where he set out to observe the nighttime gatherings of people sitting around picnic fires and bonfires. What he discovered “wasn’t just this sauce of darkness that you find in some nineteenth-century painting.” There were real and distinct colors within the dark—“there was *this* dark, Prussian blue, and *that* dark, burnt umber, and *that* dark, alizarin”—punctuated by the illumination of small fires.

By now in our conversation Webb was talking excitedly, with the expertise of someone who has been painting the figure all his life, of the tonal changes that darkness and firelight work on flesh. “It was a fantastic experience. The night beaches began to become this allegorical place of nakedness and eroticism.”

Julie Heller, who until this year represented Webb’s work (he is now represented by the Rice / Polak Gallery), gave me her thoughts on the new series: “The bonfires are a perfect metaphor for what he’s doing—life and death, night and day.”

Webb acknowledged his nod to Baroque tenebrist painting in these new works: “If you said to me two years ago that I would be painting dark paintings, night paintings, I would have laughed. I was painting these big, fresco-like day paintings, which were all about the outside light of New York or the brightly colored gyms—all about this keyed-up, light color. And all of a sudden, two years later, I’m deep in the cellar. I’m having to buy a completely different bunch of pigments, these dark grounds. I was doing everything that was antithetical to the Modernist ethos that said your paintings have to have light in them *everywhere*; you cannot make dark darks. Now I’m making



SKINNY DIP, 2011, OIL ON CANVAS, 24 BY 48 INCHES, COURTESY OF RICE POLAK GALLERY

paintings that are 98 percent dark darks, with this little tiny bit of light.”

The night paintings are also some of the most abstract, the least figurative, paintings from Webb’s hand. When I brought that up, Webb agreed, noting that in the night series “form is much more implied, much less explicit. There’s this thing with flicks and dabs of paint that evokes a figure that’s much different from the shaped-oriented thing.” Nevertheless, Webb quickly pointed out that he actually always thinks of painting abstractly: “Even when I’m working observationally. But because so much more is implied in the dark paintings, the abstraction becomes more forefronted.”

**LAST NOVEMBER**, Webb, who is a tenured professor at the Pratt Institute, curated a group show of AIDS-related paintings for New York’s Painting Center, a nonprofit exhibition space in Manhattan’s Chelsea district. Entitled *The Sword of Damocles*, the exhibit, which marks the thirtieth anniversary of the AIDS epidemic, features twelve pairs of paintings—one an early canvas and the other a later canvas—by mid-career artists who are long-term survivors of HIV.

Webb said he was looking for changes in the work—in iconography, use of space, palette, and visual language—that would trace the experience from hopelessness to hope. “The show straddles the year 1996, when the [more effective] drugs became available,” he explained. “The paintings in the midst of the epidemic were closed, darker; a lot of black was used. The narratives and symbols were all about death and dying. Doing this show was really tough because these guys’ paintings were all about that. It was really horrific.”

In contrast, Webb pointed out, the later paintings in each pair express “some idea of continuation, an opening up of space.” They “shed the grimness of the early 1990s,” he wrote in the show’s catalogue essay. “The color warms, the shapes and rhythms become more organic, and the narrative is filled with possibility, however precarious.”

Webb, who chose two of his own Punchinello paintings for the show, said that he is “fortunate to be alive,” though at times he felt “poised on the edge of an abyss.” As we wrapped up our conversation, I

asked Webb, who is a “non-progressor”—an HIV-positive person who has not contracted full-blown AIDS—if AIDS is present in every Punchinello painting he has done.

“That experience—both the seroconversion and also Chris’s death—it’s always going to be there,” he explained. “The world is the same, but completely different. You look at the great periods of art, there was always a sense of that eros / thanatos thing going on. Whether it’s in Shakespeare or Titian. That’s what art making should be about.”

“I don’t think there will ever be a painting by me that doesn’t have some level of anxiety or darkness in it about anything. But I feel extraordinarily fortunate to be able to build another life, with Brian, in New York, teaching at Pratt. The fact that I’ve survived and had this rich experience means that the Punch figure has had this richness of experience. I don’t know where it will end up. I assume my late paintings will have something to do with the epidemic and the mortality of old age.”

Ultimately, Webb said, his Punchinello paintings are about “the humanist belief that human experience is what matters, which, in this day and age, is incredibly radical. In my paintings Punchinello is a hilarious conceit. And yet filled, I hope, with pathos and meaning. In my paintings he is the hero of his life. I keep coming back to that: that sense of him as a hero.” ☘

PHILIP GAMBONE’s latest book is *Travels in a Gay Nation: Profiles of LGBTQ Americans* (Wisconsin, 2010). He teaches at Boston University Academy and in the creative and expository writing programs at Harvard Extension School.

#### NOTES

1. Stanley Kunitz, quoted in *Patrick Webb: 25 Years of Work* (Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 2008).
2. Nancy Grimes, *Punchinello Paintings*. Catalogue essay, Amos Eno Gallery, New York, 1993.
3. Nancy Grimes, *Patrick Webb: Punchinello Paintings*. Catalogue essay, Amos Eno Gallery, 1993.
4. Mark Doty, *Punchinello Goes West*. Catalogue essay, Julie Heller Gallery, 1996.
5. *Punchinello Works Out*. “Artist’s Notes,” Cortland Jessup Gallery, New York, 1998.
6. Patrick Webb, *Night and Day*. Catalogue statement, Julie Heller Gallery East, Provincetown, 2011.



# Mona Dukess

## THE OPTICAL ILLUSION OF THE HORIZON LINE

By Christopher Busa

**M**ONA DUKESS HAS been active as an artist for over three decades, ever expanding the ways she finds to draw art out of nature by utilizing its processes. She winters in Westchester, north of New York City, and has been summering with her family in Truro in a bucolic house along the Pamet River. She has exhibited in Provincetown since the early eighties, when she began showing at the legendary Group Gallery, one of the first local cooperatives run by the artists themselves.

The Truro house was designed to let the occupants experience the environment from the inside; and outside, a series of wide decks are stepped to lead through native plantings down toward the river. Much of her handmade paper is botanical in inspiration. She has absorbed the long-term effect of repeated viewing from multiple levels of looking. Similarly, the eddying of water exposes gradations, the layers where patterns in the sand show the



WHITE LIGHT, 1984, PIGMENTS, LINEN AND JAPANESE FIBERS, 26 BY 20 INCHES



WHITE TULIP, 2001, PIGMENTED HANDMADE PAPER, 30 BY 30 INCHES

markings of the receding tide. She has pondered reflections on water, their action in inlets, where the water moving over the surface bottom reveals its topography and shows little islands with tall grasses. The locals have a happy time organizing a “Pamet River Float”—floating on rubber rafts and inner tubes while being swept up-river on the incoming tide. The twice-a-day periodicity of tides gives a pulse to waters that teem with embryonic life. In one of several conversations I had with Dukess, she remarked how surprised she was to notice, “Even when water is still, there is always movement on or beneath its surface.” Water is a recurrent theme in all her work.

Something I recently read about Dukess struck me as significant: when she was beginning as an artist, she had a fear of a blank sheet of paper. In her own way—the way artists tend to their troubles by turning them into solutions—she decided to put the image or its colors in the paper itself, releasing her to accept a “given” as an initial starting point on an otherwise blank sheet of paper. Although she later painted exquisite landscapes striated with horizontal sweeps taking place below and above the horizon, it is in papermaking that the artist has stamped her most original signature.

Since she began this new work, Dukess has returned periodically to make her own paper at a custom paper mill in New York City, Dieu Donné. Artistic Director Paul Wong, working with Dukess on the *Genesis Series*, wrote that they both sought to expand the format of her work, seeking to capture the horizontality of land and water vistas: “Her interpretations of Nature have given way to archetypal forms internalized in feminine symbols of birth, the Egg, the Embryo.”

*Dieu donné* is French for “God given.” “Donné” is the word that Henry James used to describe how he started his novels, with a “given,” a “thread” or “strand” that is pulled out bit by bit until the story emerges, offering surprise and discovery.

*White Tulip* (2001) fostered an extended series identifying individual flowers from her garden. The pulp was made from thick cotton, plant fiber that is 90 percent cellulose and the remarkable molecular glue that holds paper together with tensile strength formed by a matrix that functions like steel-reinforcement wire embedded in concrete walls. It seems strange to speak of the strength of paper, but there is a secret to its power. The artist Robert Henry, a friend and colleague of Dukess, said that he has “always been struck by [her] fresco-like quality,” noting how, to make frescos, you blend pigment with wet plaster.

*White Tulip* is a signature motif—a single blossom of a flower, conspicuously enlarged in scale, so that a white tulip, in the manner of Andy Warhol’s silk screens of photographed flowers, will occupy the entire frame, appearing boldly larger than any actual tulip. The supersized images



offer a sense of sudden emphasis and explosive power. The presentation becomes homage to the tulip's essence—its tight bud breaking into six petals, shaped like a turban, from which the tulip's name is derived. (Turkish men often wore tulips in their turbans, and so it is odd that this flower of romance could be viewed as a cup-like shape or an open vessel.) Some material transformation seems directing a similar impulse in the turpentine-thinned paint stained into untreated linen of the late Helen Frankenthaler. There are foundations in Abstract Expressionism in the use of the accident, such as the effect of gravity on a drip of paint, to add a stamp of authenticity to a process an artist does not fully control.

Dukess is fascinated with many papers, but that particular cotton pulp—toothy, thick, and dense—suited her meditation on the enigma of flowers, in particular their display at occasions both solemn and celebratory. The sanction of ceremony allows us to share the mystery that flowers are, frankly, the sexual organs of plants.

Depending on what the image is, Dukess wants a compatible look in the material. She was making watercolors at the same time she was making paper, soaking the paper and then using much diluted colors that would bleed into the paper. Earlier, she had tried painting with acrylics, but the hard edge restricted her. Looking at the Cape landscape, with its broad divisions of sky and water, she knew she needed something softer, less a horizon line than a zone of division. The fact is the horizon line is an illusion, an imaginary line seen from three miles away as the planet begins to curve out of view, not an actual line that anyone could stand on.

**A BODY OF WORKS** from her *Genesis Series* (1984) reveals the aptness of its creation metaphor. Fissures, rips, and ribbons reveal nascent secondary hues, suggesting emergence. In *White Light*, a very light blue oval shape is divided vertically by a parallel pair of thin, dark-blue vertical zips. Every passage offers a rich variety of pastel tones. This emphasis on division has an analogue in the spacing between her works displayed as diptychs or triptychs, as in *Garden Calligraph*, where the viewer can complete a line by the eye jumping over the space between panels.

The artist Budd Hopkins took keen interest in Dukess's subtle harmonies, writing in a catalogue essay: "Dukess obviously has a very personal way with lavenders, pinks and soft greens and blues. According to the tired old cliché, pastel hues are supposed to be pale and 'feminine,' as if a more robust color world has somehow been drained of 'masculine' forcefulness. Placing, say, a thin icy green next to a pale smoking magenta she would produce knife-edged color tension that totally subverted the idea of pastel politeness. In much of her work she performs like a kind of undercover Fauvist, producing color energy in abundance, but using the subtlest of means."

We can say that the artist uses plant material to depict plants, but that is like an abstract painter declaring that the subject of his paintings is paint. The material must be a medium for transformation; for Dukess, each swerve in her career fosters new insights into the metaphors her work yields. The papers in the *Flower Series* were not beaten to the point where the surface was smoothly flat. The fibers were clouded with invisibility. In the *Genesis Series*, with its focus on contour between shape and compositional colors, the fibers are alive with activity, nuanced with inflections caused by light hitting the turbulent surface from refracted angles, much the way the sun strikes a body of water as currents move beneath it.

Dukess told me that "one of the things that happens in papermaking is that some of the pigments *rhyme*—are not static and run more than others do. So you



*GARDEN CALLIGRAPH*, 2006, PIGMENTS, WATERMARKED HANDMADE PAPERS, 36.5 BY 29 INCHES



*MAP I*, 2010, ULTRACHROME PIGMENTS ON PAPER, 10 BY 10 INCHES



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have a bleed. There is an expression that some colors 'travel.' It's not a medium to use if you want a very exact result. You have to be willing to let things happen, and then use them." Her traveling colors seem like the dispersing trails left by airplanes as they cut so exactly through the sky.


Some of Dukess's watermarked papers refer to roots, branches, and twigs; others to the patterns of beach pebbles or the scallop patterns left by wave action in sand exposed at low tide. None of these elements finds its way into the finished work, only the impression remaining in the watermarks, which feel somewhat ghostly and curiously haunting. At times, in a work such as *Garden Calligraph*, I have the sensation I am peeking at a microscopic detail under great magnification.

Dukess swims almost every day, mostly in the bay. As she swims, she thinks of how many people could be swimming in waters a thousand miles away and, she said, she feels a "web of connection with humanity and life itself." Let us say that she has found a way to become part of the elemental slurry when in the water and can carry the sensation back to her studio, where she plunges her hands into the pulp of an emerging work, with fresh expectations that stimulate her intuition.

**FROM A POEM** by Elizabeth Bishop, "The Map," Dukess took the phrase *Mapped Waters* to serve as the title of her latest body of work, exhibited last August at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. The new series uses a process of digitizing a photograph of a landscape detail, as reflected on the surface of the water. "I didn't want to use conventional photography and a darkroom, so I went to a New York digital artist who lives near me, Henry Mandell, who is very sophisticated in the use of the computer as an artist's tool, and he could help me express the nuances and the detail that I wanted to emphasize in my prints. I've been fortunate to work with people who understand what I want and guide me toward my goals with the tools I need, without influencing me with my own work."

Bishop's poem "The Map" describes the landscape from the mapmaker's point of view, vastly reduced in scale, such that "the names of seashore towns run out to sea, / the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains." The projections of the map's peninsulas become the size of human digits: "These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger / like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods."

These recent works using computer tools are not unlike Elizabeth Bishop's conception of the mapmaker as a namer of places or a chooser of "more delicate" colors depicting oceans and mountains.

The current process is concurrent with Dukess's previous methods: "The *Mapped Waters* prints originate with images I find through the lens of my eyes, the lens of a digital camera, and the lens of water itself." 

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is publisher of Provincetown Arts. More information about Mona Dukess can be found at [www.monadukess.com](http://www.monadukess.com).



# William Papaleo, Painter

## LAYERED LIFE, LAYERED WORK

By E. J. Kahn III

**A**RTIST WILLIAM PAPALEO was Bill, actually Billy, when we first met. That was decades ago, when our fathers—Joseph, known to us as Joe, and E.J. Jr., recognized as Jack, both writers, both finding success—would spend summers in Truro, a genteel mosaic of tennis in the afternoons, cocktails at sunset, lobster and swordfish on the dinner table, literary and gallery gossip in the air. We'd see each other on the local courts—my father's and his neighbor's, Lee Falk, the creator of *The Phantom* and *Mandrake the Magician*—and, before Bill had turned twenty, were drawn as partners in an end-of-season doubles tournament on the Falk court. Our final match together, perhaps for the championship, was interrupted by the news that, at the end of South Pamet Road (where we were competing), a Ballston Beach dune had collapsed. At least one young boy, who'd been playing with friends on it, was trapped under the sand and clay avalanche.

I was the editor of the *Provincetown Advocate* at the time and left as quickly as I could. We may have finished the match, but neither Bill nor I remember. The boy on the beach died. I wrote a story. The Park Service soon thereafter prohibited any climbing on the National Seashore dunes. And Bill—as he would tell me decades later—went home and, that night, dreamt. “In the dream,” he recalled last year, “I was one of the kids and at the same time I was watching myself die and become the sand dune. The last image of the dream was my awareness of being the highlight of light on the last grain of sand that I had become and at the same time a consciousness that was outside observing that reality. It was sort of like a Blake poem, seeing the world in a grain of sand.” He would say, decades later, that this epiphany of perception would inform both his decision to become an artist and the art itself.

Over the years that passed, our paths would occasionally cross, but it wasn't until 2008 that we fully reconnected. By then, Bill had established himself on two continents—as a politically and socially active painter of working-class figures set in gritty Italian cities such as Naples and Salerno, and of idyllic landscapes set on Outer Cape Cod and the Amalfi Coast. His work had been collected by museums (Castellammare, Italy, for one), institutions (Banco di Napoli, University of Salerno), nonprofits (The Mountains Restoration Trust, Santa Monica, for example), and exhibited at galleries both here and abroad (the Wohlfarth Galleries of Washington, DC, and Provincetown currently represent him in the States). Our reintroduction took place on Long Nook Road in Truro, where he had set up his easel across the street from the cottage where I was staying. On this warm, sunlit early July afternoon, Bill was carefully applying short, fine brushstrokes in layers of slightly differentiated shades of color to a vision of a stunted pine forest. Two years later, I would see the painter at work again, this time in a Tuscan valley, on a hillside looking over an olive grove toward the tiny village of Pozzo, where—over the course of five days—he produced nine oil sketches and finished paintings in a dizzying burst of creativity.

As we spent more time together, I proposed a conversation that would touch on his life's journey and his work. The interview that follows has taken place in several settings—on the Cape, in New York, by Skype from Naples, and sipping limoncello in the kitchen of a villa in Tuscany. And it begins with a question about his dream in Truro, in the early seventies.

**EJK** Your dream seems to be focused on light, its illumination, and what that shows. How does that translate into the journey of becoming an artist?

**WP** The memory of the dream had a very positive effect on me and my future paintings. I began to be aware of an individual essence that was my individual self but also connected to the universe in a dynamic way. This



AMALFI COAST ROAD 1 (FIRST PANEL OF TRIPTYCH), 2009, OIL ON CANVAS, 32 BY 24 INCHES, COURTESY WOHLFARTH GALLERIES

resulted also in specific landscapes that related to this experience as well as a generally more mature sense of self. It became a thematic element in my painting. I tried to define it recently, in an essay I wrote for the Fulbright Conference on Italian American Culture at the University of Salerno. What I said was that—although identity is multifaceted, fluid, and expanding as it grows and interacts—there is still the desire to find a unified focus, a center fulcrum, the dot of light that is not transmutable but remains individual and universal at the same time. There remains a search for the home of the soul, that dot in the distance that gives sense to the landscape and its observer. This may play a part in why I choose the long vista, and explore the aerial perspective and the color and light of landscape in the distance, both in my American and Italian work. The big vista as mental expanse and as grounding appeals to me.

**EJK** When did your commitment to becoming an artist begin?

**WP** In some respects, when I had the dream it had already begun. When I was a very little kid on the Cape, I began to draw. We were surrounded by artists and writers—our fathers, the sculptor Sidney Simon, many others. I can recall a moment with my father and Carmen Cicero, together out





AFTER THE SWIM, 2007, OIL ON WOOD, 24 BY 32 INCHES, KAHN COLLECTION

on a bank of the Pamet River, where Carmen was painting an abstract landscape. "The air," he told my father, "has color." And I saw what he meant. I was fascinated by it. I picked art up again as an adolescent, and—on a trip to California when I was

twenty-first began doing landscapes. I don't know if there was a "moment," but it seemed like a natural evolution. I was already interested in light and color, and my father had wanted to be a painter before he became a writer. When I returned, I met Henry Hensche, who ran the Cape Cod School of Art, and studying with him made perfect sense.

**EJK** On your website ([www.williampapaleo.it](http://www.williampapaleo.it)) you highlight a quote from the philosopher Robert Henri, which reads, "Always we would try to tie down the great to our little nationalism, whereas every great artist is a person who has freed themselves from family, nation and race. Every individual who has shown the world that way to beauty, to true culture, has been a rebel, a 'universal' without patriotism, without home, who has found their people everywhere, a person whom all the world recognizes, accepts, whether they speak through music, painting, words or form." Does this describe you?

**WP** Henri was the philosophical teacher at the Art Students League of the Ashcan School, the modern realists, so to speak. They seemed, to me, to be honest and genuine, authentic. I agree with Henri on the point he makes that any subject is good and possible as long as you can identify with it and make it yours. I like the way Americans took Impressionism and used it as a way to paint the modern scene, so that it was no longer a style but a technique through which to be in the moment.

That said, the Ashcan School artists were immigrants who came to America, and I've done the opposite. My upbringing was comfortable, and the Cape has been a nurturing place for artists. To be real, I decided I had to go out of that milieu. Coming to Italy, I was both fascinated and engaged. I gained both an identity and a social conscience, influenced by Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. There was this part of me I had to discover, the Italian in me. As I did, I became more conscious of what was going on in society here, and that evolved into other work. I won a big commission to paint the

shipbuilders in Castellammare, and another to paint an immigrant group.

**EJK** I have read that you refer to yourself as an "American" artist, but it seems that you truly are Italian-American in your work.

**WP** Well, I think it's fair to say I have an Italian consciousness, whereas most Italians in America have a kind of cultural amnesia. I knew virtually nothing about my roots. I had visited Italy with my family in 1968, when my father had published a well-received novel and had money for our travel, but didn't realize anything about Italians in America. When Sacco and Vanzetti were killed in 1927, Italians didn't want to rock the boat. They chose to blend in, forget everything, get a job, fit in.

All the things that Italians today say about the immigrants who are coming into Italy are what Americans said about Italians in the 1920s: "America is going downhill. . . . The Italians will destroy the country. . . . They're all terrorists, anarchists." My work touches on the same theme.

I've written on my website that we are living in a strange civilization. Our minds and souls are so overlaid with fear, with artificiality, that often we do not even recognize beauty. It is this fear, this lack of direct vision of truth, that brings about all the disaster the world holds—and how little opportunity we give any people for casting off fear, for living simply and naturally. When they do, first of all we fear them, then we condemn them. It is only if they are great enough to outlive our condemnation that we accept them. The series of portraits I titled *Workers* reflects this perspective and the current context in Italy.

**EJK** In *Italian Stories*, a collection of short stories that won an American Book Award in 2002, your father wrote that "there will be no deceit or trickery in this volume, just my screaming voice telling you the truth, and don't believe that . . . even the truth is hype." Does your work attempt to "scream the truth"?

**WP** (Laughing) Well, the thing is, *truth* is a dangerous word. I remember Henry Hensche talking about truth, and it was funny. After a year of studying with him and listening to him repeat, over and over, "You've got to paint visual truth, visual truth, visual truth," he changed his message. "The best painters," he then said, "are the best liars." Grace Paley, a friend of my father's, once added, "Stick to the facts, and you won't write about the truth." In other words, there has to be something true in what you're doing. You have to be genuine and true. But we're dealing with illusions, with fantasy, with imagination. There's no perfect truth in art.

**EJK** Yet you do go for representational truth in terms of your choice of landscapes and portraits as your subject matter.

**WP** Yes, I want people to relate to my art. I want to communicate, and there has to be some kind of identification with place. García Lorca has made the point, talking about poetry, that one can write a poem about New York City without knowing New York, but to be truthful, the poet must have a lyrical reaction to the city. In other words, it has to be genuine, and that requires work that must be

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done beforehand. When you're in the moment, as an artist, you have to be genuine and create what happens. It's a spontaneous thing that you're not in control of.

Coming to Italy, I spent some time in the north studying church fresco and Renaissance techniques, but the south continued to call and inspire me, like an unconscious memory. Southern Italy has suffered eleven dominations in seven centuries and has the depth of an oppressed people and thus, as a subject, contains a universality despite its provincialism. The best an artist can do, given a new situation, is to produce a lyrical reaction to the environment that confronts him. Preferable to a rendering from the outside or a visual description of a voyage, an inward reflection, with a knowledge of the subject in mind, makes a work that, I hope, is more sincere and original.

**EJK** For me, your landscapes of the Amalfi Coast, Tuscany, and, in particular, the woods, ponds, and beaches of Truro and Wellfleet are the essence of an art that aspires to be genuine and true, but is colored by illusion and fantasy.

**WP** As Corot once said, all his paintings were memories of childhood. But to me, my memories of the Cape of my childhood are pure pleasure, a pure sensual relationship to nature. To re-create that, I have also used nude models in the sun, which is a rarity. At Castle Hill and at other locations in Truro, there's enough privacy. Not very many artists have had the chance to do something like that. In some respects, it's a development that derives from the mud heads of Hawthorne, mud heads that for me became immigrants in Italy. But nude models in the open air, even swimming in the ponds... that's the pure sensual freedom that the Cape provides.

**EJK** You've used both pastels and oils in your landscapes.

**WP** I work in pastel, watercolor, and oil, and I do pastels for light studies or if I'm going to a difficult-to-reach place in the mountains. I'll take my pastels if I'm climbing a goat path or the Path of the Gods, where Wagner would go to be inspired. With oils, for the most part, I paint from memory.

**EJK** Your brushstroke technique for your landscape oils, speaking from my admittedly un-expert point of view, seems unusual—textured with what seems to be more than one color in the brushstroke. . . . I'm not describing this well.

**WP** Actually you've picked up on something that isn't exactly a secret, but is a technique. It's taken some time to develop it. On the same brushstroke, to have a prismatic effect, I have more than one color on the brush. When it works, I think it's very successful. But again, those things come from influences. A lot of figurative painters sometimes forget



WORKERS 2, 1994, OIL ON WOOD PANEL, 79 BY 60 INCHES, COURTESY OF CASTELLAMMARE DI STABIA, WORKERS MUSEUM, CASTELLAMMARE DI STABIA, ITALY

the lessons of the abstract painters, which is a focus on the surface. We're at a time now when all these things are emerging.

**EJK** Speaking of emergence, your political conscience and its reflection in your art has resulted in a series of strong, challenging portraits whose subjects you variously describe as Immigrants or Asylum Seekers.

**WP** Those evolved out of my work with Amnesty International, which I'd gotten involved with through the University of Salerno. I did some work with the organization as a translator and as a contributor of artwork for their Giffoni Film Festival, where the Best Directors of a human-rights film received paintings of mine. Through Amnesty International, I was introduced to the politics around immigration in Italy and to several immigrants, whom I arranged to be interviewed. Their stories became monologues that were performed at a multimedia event also featuring my first *Immigrant-Emigrant* paintings. This past year, I created a new series based on old photos of Italian immigrants, and combined these with the old and new immigrants in Italy for a retrospective show in Salerno.

This past February, I'll have had (the interview was conducted prior to the show) a show in Naples at Maschio Angioino, a castle near the City Hall that the mayor—who's hosting and sponsoring the event—often uses for exhibitions. This will have been a mix

of cityscapes—Naples and its workers—and *Immigrant-Emigrant* paintings. There's a revival happening in Naples, a renewal that is built in part on a people's movement addressing city services like garbage removal. The event itself is designed to shine some light on these working classes, and—after twenty-five years—I'm finally seen as one of them, a working painter in Naples, and not a visiting American.

**EJK** Finally, where does 2012 take you and your art?

**WP** Well, I've mentioned the Naples show, of course. And that mixture of images that represents past and present in my Italian experience will be shown again at the Italian Embassy in Washington, DC, in October.

On the Cape I will continue to work on the development of light studies that will include the figure and landscape. I will also be teaching these elements at a Castle Hill workshop in early August, and a painting workshop on the Cilento Coast in the mountains above the sea, in one of the most pristine and natural parts of Southern Italy, in September. I'll also be doing a multidisciplinary workshop on the Amalfi Coast this fall, together with theater director and actor-trainer Sylvia Toone. Returning to the Cape always improves my painting. I can check my progress as I reflect on my lifetime visits here.

At the Calandra Institute in New York, I will be showing *New Immigrant* and *Neapolitan* images. Fred Gardaphe, a professor at Queens College and acting head of Calandra in the city, has been referencing my work in recent lectures on "the new immigrant in Italy."

At a conference sponsored by the Fulbright Foundation, he used my work as an example of the third-generation Italian who has become an immigrant by choice for cultural reasons, and how we work to combat the political, historical, and cultural amnesia many Italian-Americans suffer from today. In a lecture I gave at that conference, I described my artistic and cultural experiments in Italy as being the natural consequence of my experience of the Outer Cape as a sophisticated mixture of art and culture in a natural, sustainable environment. In the future, with my paintings I hope to show that Southern Italy has these possibilities, as well as an ancient culture to preserve. I also hope to continue to return to work and enjoy the Cape, to remember where I am from and remind me how I want to continue. ☞

*E. J. KAHN III—better known as "Terry" in the Pamet Valley—has served as an editor of the late Provincetown Advocate and Boston Magazine, and as a consultant in Washington and New York City, where he lives with his wife, Lesley Silvester.*





# John Hultberg: Poet Painter

## THE CLIMATE OF UNCERTAINTY

By Wendy Gittler

*The further I go, the more I am inclined to translate thought into something quite different than literature.*

— Gauguin, 1888

**J**OHN HULTBERG WOULD often write in his journals about wanting to “go deeper into my own climate,” engaging in a dialogue with his alter ego: “You must go as deeply in the realm of hard things . . . as I go into my undocumented poetic insights.” In this enigmatic zone where poetry and painting meet in a landscape of the self, a long history can be traced. The exploration of subjectivity and its alliance with painting and poetry is first clearly delineated in the Romantic movement and subsequently followed by an ever-expanding path through Symbolism, Metaphysical painting, Surrealism, and finally the various modalities of the Abstract Expressionists.

Autobiography, as revelatory of states of mind as well as the psychological unraveling of memory and private narrative, frequently plays a major role in the fusion of poetry and painting. From an early age, Hultberg was involved in the interaction between ideas, words, and images. In high school he focused on art and literature, and later, at Fresno State College, he edited the school newspaper. During those years, he devoured art books and the

classics from the library. The Californian landscape of his childhood was permanently imprinted upon his imagination. He wrote in detail about a vivid memory of his backyard, populated with an orchard swing and a chicken house that had been converted to a workshop “messy with abandoned projects.” The forlorn, abandoned objects in the workshop resonate later in his detritus-strewn landscapes.

Born in 1922 in San Francisco, Hultberg came of age following World War II, after having served as a navigator in an aircraft carrier in the Pacific. At this crucial juncture in the fertile crosscurrents of the aftermath of war, Hultberg’s private life intermeshed with world history. Although he did not experience combat during the war, his premonitions of “Something is about to Happen” appear in his apocalyptic landscapes, where sky and earth battle for ascendancy amidst a land scattered with enclosures of past memories and fragmentary objects. Hultberg’s time spent working in the shipyards of California and New York, as well as the Surrealist influence of his Parisian years, may hold some clues to the nature of his imagery of abandoned architectonic structures and myriad hybrid objects.

Hultberg’s mid-twentieth century visionary landscapes were revisited in a recent traveling exhibit, which began concurrently at the Monhegan

Museum and the Hultberg collection at the Portland Museum of Art in Maine. With a long association with Provincetown since the 1950s, he is in the permanent collection of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, and his work was featured in the historical exhibit *The League at the Cape* in 1993.

The panoramic space of Hultberg’s paintings recalls the *Weltanschauung* (worldview) of the sixteenth-century Northern European painters, such as Altdorfer and others. However, Hultberg casts his subjective reverie upon his *mise-en-scène*. His world of disruption, displacement, and the fragmentary remains of catastrophic events echos our contemporary anxiety over the fragility and vulnerability of the destructive forces that confront our civilization and planet.

Hultberg reconstructed many of his images and words from film, television, and newspapers, re-creating a pictorial drama of a world torn asunder. An implicit mood of angst pervades over his world of discarded and eroded industrial and organic forms, often observed by shadowy surrogate humans or winged creatures waiting for omens or signs of things to come. His spectral inhabitants wander, fly, or plummet through a debris-ridden universe in search of survival. Thus at mid-century, Hultberg culled a complex pictorial language of symbols, ideographs, signs, and glyphs that bridges





FACING PAGE: *Twilight: Down the Drain*, 1975, OIL AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 98 BY 158 INCHES, COURTESY PORTLAND MUSEUM OF ART  
 ABOVE: *Shabby Angel*, 1980, GOUACHE AND ACRYLIC ON FOAM BOARD, 14 BY 22 INCHES

a subjective interior space with that of the outside world. It might well be a later development of Mallarmé's dictum advising poets and painters not to describe but to evoke and suggest.

In *Twilight: Down the Drain* (1975), Hultberg orchestrates several conflicting pictorial traditions: a perspectival system that appears to recede into infinity, a progression of overlapping cubes, and an apocalyptic narrative. In his journals, he pays homage to Gottlieb's pictographs saying: "I like what he did—putting a whole bunch of pictures into a picture." Portholes, film, and television screens become a depository of thoughts, personages, bones, and objects that are pulled away with the gravitational force of a black hole. In this Wagnerian *Götterdämmerung* twinged with irony, spectral figures embedded in the earth and sky watch their own demise.

In 1969, Martha Jackson, his friend and dealer, died suddenly, closing a decade of personal and professional backing. *Twilight: Down the Drain* and *Epitaphs* (1977) allude to the sense of transience of intimate experiential moments when time seems to contain eternity. Although Hultberg's world is one of impermanence and movement, memory can be ignited by the eruptive flickering from one of his screen surfaces excavating the past. His screens reflect both his unconscious flow of thoughts and his recorded journal of dreams, suggesting files of stored memories that fill the space as far as the ever-receding horizon.

*Shabby Angel* (1980) can act as a sequel to *Twilight: Down the Drain*. The setting evokes the aftermath of a storm, where an exhausted angel without flight (a wry Beckettian humor is implied) drags itself along a charred architectonic structure overlooking Monhegan meadow and harbor. A landmass on the horizon could also be seen as a darkened sky. For Hultberg, skies reflect the key to mood, recalling his Californian teacher, Clay Spohn, who told him to pay attention to weather patterns and clouds. A dark specter perching on the crevices of the burnt structure stands as a sentinel. The human form for Hultberg can be a shadow, or ghost, or surrogate guardian acting as a precarious observer of uncontrollable events.

An existential uncertainty permeates Hultberg's vision. His paintings become a battleground

between an object-laden entrapped earth and the hosannas of his heavenly realms. In the twenty-first century, we are closer to his fluid protean world of hybrid images and syncretic combinations of high and low culture, diverse pictorial lexicons, and the need for a poetic and narrative content. He has amassed an assemblage of conflicting philosophical vantage points combining an aspect of the American Transcendentalists with an ironic fatalism embodied in the antics of roaming angels and demons. Hultberg can be viewed as a poet-seer of the contemporary condition; his earthly inhabitants, analogous to characters from Beckett's plays, wait expectantly as they gaze toward the edge of earth and sky.

In this excerpt from his poem "Astronomers," Hultberg writes:

Or do you fly like angels above your fear,  
 Intoxicated by the great creature's respiration,  
 Knowing we're closer to reward with each light  
 year  
 We speed away from the crumbling center of its  
 expiration?  
 Tell me! Is your universe awakening or going to  
 sleep?  
 How long can you its worn-out secret keep?

Words and images echo in their corresponding roles in Hultberg's paintings and poems. The physicality of his painting, with its thrusts and pulls, coalesces with his words: "respiration," "expiration," "speed," "crumbling center"; and, likewise, his ascending and descending surrogate spirits jostle with the phrases of his poem: "Tell me! . . . How long? . . ." The synapses and circuits of his mind prod the visual and verbal into a dialogue. As a poet-painter Hultberg affirms Gauguin's search for a union of thought and image. ▀

WENDY GITTLER is a painter, writer, and art historian. She exhibits at First Street Gallery in New York City and has taught at numerous schools including Hunter College, SVA, Parsons School of Design, and the New York Studio School. She currently lectures on art to graduate philosophy students at SUNY in New York.



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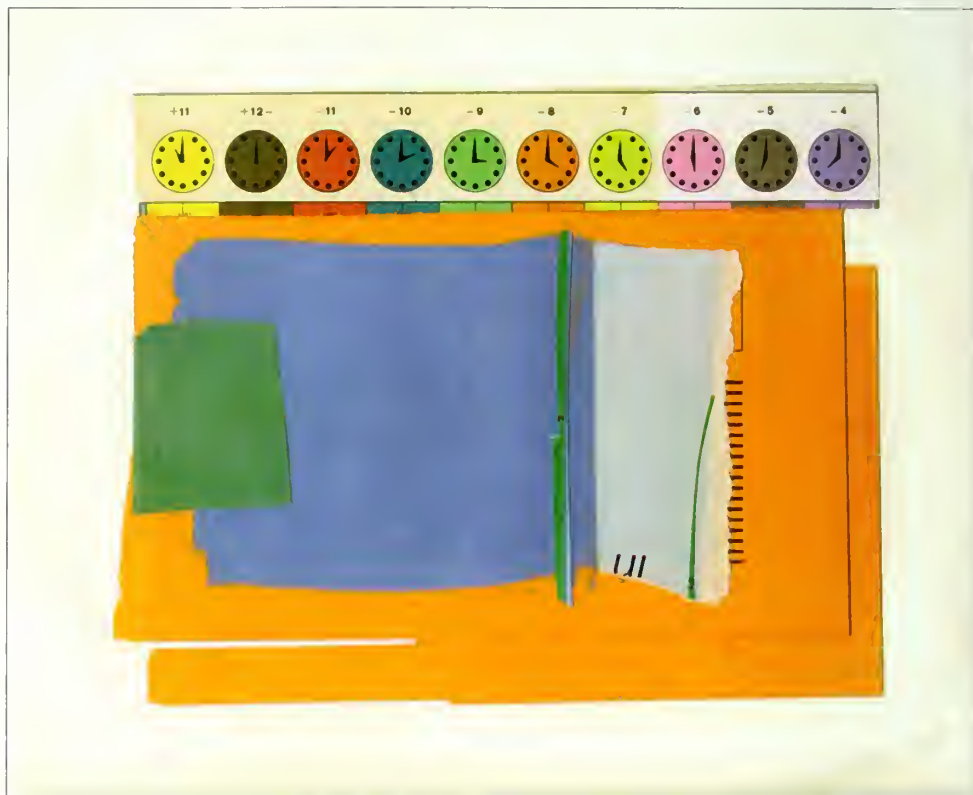
# Karen Cappotto

## FINDING "ANOTHER LAYER OF MEANING"

By Christopher Busa

**A** CENTURY HAS PASSED since Picasso and Braque invented the contemporary concept of collage, the gluing of extraneous materials onto a painting surface. They pushed each other, stealing ideas from each other's studios, driven by anxiety over the increasing analytic aspect of early Cubist painting, where facets of three-dimensional subjects were crushed flat as if by a steamroller, pressed into sharp facets where volume once swelled. As the "flatness" of the two-dimensional picture plane began to lead these artists toward the absurd reduction to eliminate illusion from pictorial representation, heading inevitably into extreme abstraction, they rebelled, adding sculptural elements such as swatches of oil cloth simulating the grain of chair caning. The motivation was to introduce another "reality" into painting, as Clement Greenberg famously wrote in his seminal essay "Collage," perhaps the most influential essay on the Modernist impulse to combine disparate elements.

Now comes Karen Cappotto, winner of a Lilian Orlowsky and William Freed Foundation Grant offered by the Provincetown Art Association and Museum to encourage mid-career artists to persevere. Her paintings and collages appeared last year in a revelatory exhibition curated by Mike Wright, *Beyond Surface*. Orlowsky and Freed were students



TENDER BUTTONS, 2011, VINTAGE PAPER AND PAINT, 9 BY 11 INCHES



FEEL LIKE A SHADOW, 2011, MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 9 BY 11 INCHES

of Hans Hofmann, whose teachings focused on activating the shallow space of Cubism into a "push-and-pull" tension that energized the painting's flatness with a volumetric reaction, much like the way the surface of a water balloon, when depressed by one's index finger, would bulge in another area.

Cappotto belatedly absorbed the elongated history of this medium, further elaborated by artists from Kurt Schwitters to Robert Motherwell. When she was a child with no formal art education, she made banners for her church and cut out mobiles for her school's music room. Her father was a woodworker and sculptor, "with great organizational skills," and her mother came from a family of farmers who were always working with their hands. "Making things," she said, "comforts me more than making dinner."

I visited Cappotto's Provincetown studio, compact and utilitarian as a dune shack, on a chilly day in November; a small electric heater made the little space cozy. In tidy flat files and stacked on open shelves, collage elements were sorted in related categories: old maps, shapes of ducks and bears from children's primers, scraps of stenciled words, rows of color charts. Several tomes of favored artists,





BRIDGE I, 2009, OIL ON PANEL, 9 BY 12 INCHES

including Richard Diebenkorn, were at hand nearby, and I opened the Diebenkorn to the California artist's *Ocean Park* series, depicting the view from the high hills on the West Coast looking down on vast spaces, diagramming them from a great distance. An Abstract Expressionist not seasoned by the dark urban angst of New York, Diebenkorn rained skeins of light upon vistas organized by lines of connection, almost not real, but indicating a yearning to span wide gaps. When I saw this, I saw the logic of Cappotto's *Bridge I* (2009), an oil painting on a wood panel showing the sketched span of a bridge connecting the wide blue water to the land masses that were separated by the water. The bridge emerges as scratches asserting the struggle to link, offering a strange association between the blended layering of her collages and the frank geographic connections she makes in her paintings.

*Tender Buttons* (2011) is a collage by Cappotto derived from antique maps of an emerging America, acquired from the collection of the Provincetown bricoleur and historian George Bryant, which Cappotto retrieved in a yard sale. She was moved by the cartographer's tentative steps to order the wildness of uncharted territory. "In the end," she said, "I intervened with paint until there were but traces left, as I work in a spatial ambiguity by concealing and obliterating the wholeness of their etchings. All that's left of the institutional voice are slivers of mappings, a line here and a boundary stroke there."

Ten colored clocks, indicating hour by hour differences in time, dominate the top and offer a temporal order to a static image below. *Tender Buttons* is also the title of a literary experiment written by Gertrude Stein, using the sound of words to overlay and add sense beyond the meaning of the words; Stein, aesthetically close to Picasso, understood that just as color could be separated from subject, so words could be separated from ordinary meaning, releasing nuances never noted before. Zips and

strips slice up the ground below the clocks, and a bar code intervenes like a measuring stick, indicating established identity already documented. The emotional resonance of this work is secured by its compositional restraint.

*Feeling like a Shadow*, a related collage from 2011, is organized as a diptych, depicting pink as a shadow of white, and sharing the oval shape of old maps cut out to recall, Cappotto said, the swimming pool she looked down upon from her second-story childhood bedroom. She viewed the family watering hole from above, suggesting to her "the warm, airy, almost ethereal feeling of opening a window." Color bars run across the top and bottom edges much as the colored clocks depicted in *Tender Buttons* indicate measurement and order. "To the collagist," she said, "the very gathering of materials adds yet another layer of meaning." Vintage papers, dog-eared and foxed, become beautiful when her hand reveals her mood in her manner of layering. Her process is to search her unconscious to discover emotional connections with abandoned materials.

Cappotto is married to the Irish filmmaker Kevin Liddy and spends periods of the year in Ireland and with relatives in Sicily. Traveling, out of necessity, she is obliged to bring her studio with her. Early on, she doubted her talents as a painter and felt that collage was the way she could express herself without an elaborate studio. She was nagged by the sense that, as an artist, she was a "second cousin to painting," producing collages more diagrammatic than fully fleshed out as tonal volumes. "When I was in Sicily," she told me, "I met relatives that I didn't know existed, and they presented me with the very materials I had been working with in America, but they gave me, say, the Italian version of *LIFE* magazine. That's when I felt I was doing what I was supposed to be doing."

The collages assume an aerial perspective, the result of looking down, usually on an intimate scale,

while she works. Here Cappotto isolates a crucial difference between making collages and making paintings, where she will stand back and consider how aspects interact from a more horizontal perspective. Her natural inclination is to work in a series, letting one work lead to the next. Because her collages are small, working in multiples allows her to make larger statements. Now, she told me, her friends and colleagues keep telling her, "Go bigger! Go bigger! Just recently, someone has taken some of my collages and blown them up: I see they really do hold." Now she wants to challenge herself to achieve a strength she sees in other painters' work, which she doesn't think she can achieve simply with paper. She is modest in the shadow of the achievements of other painters she admires—such as Joan Mitchell's ability to paint "large, with clusters of energy and economy of gesture." Yet she is committed to ceremony and ritual and considers just the entering of her studio as a privileged occasion.

"To me," she said, "as a woman, I want to feel strong and present—*physicality*. This is where collage has led me, out of the past and the need to work out old issues. I sometimes feel the sinking heartache of all that's left unsaid, the haunting that holds our hand through the years—all of our love lost can be found in the remains of refuse. Doing collages, I look down all the time and that has consequences. Now, I also want to get some big cans of paint and look up!" 🐘

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is publisher of Provincetown Arts.

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# Judith Trepp: "Stillness Is Motion in Repose"

AN EXPLORATION OF AN EXPANDED IDEA OF LINE

By Christopher Busa



UNTITLED (NR. 2011-01-01), 2011, EGG TEMPERA, OIL, AND OIL STICK ON LINEN, 31.5 BY 195 INCHES (4 PANELS)

JUDITH TREPP SPENT her childhood and early adult years returning to Provincetown in the summers, lapsed while in Europe, then returned again for more than thirty summers, seeking some continuity with our shores and the expatriate community she enjoys off-season in Switzerland, where she resides with her husband, the Swiss artist Thomas Dubs. There is always a lesson in cross-cultural experience, extracted from the confusion we experience in trying to understand another culture in turbulent currents. Most of her exhibitions have been in Europe; last summer, her exhibition *Beyond Line*

at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum brought fresh attention to this seasoned artist.

I wondered if Judith Trepp was an American artist or a Swiss artist.

"I'm both and neither," she answered in a composed tone that convinced me she had thought deeply about the question. "I've lived in Switzerland most of my adult life, longer than I have lived in America. I've absorbed both cultures and created an identity out of both of them. I have dual citizenship."

She moved from New York to Zurich in 1970, carrying with her the orientation of her formative years. She was part of the avant-garde fervor at Bard College when it was a hotbed of Abstract Expressionist thinking. Out of that powerful movement, she said, she needed years to find her own "space." If Abstract Expressionism had "triumphed" in America, in the word of Irving Sandler's classic book, the movement in Switzerland was not so widely known. The Swiss ethos was much cooler, more Minimalist, more restrained in expression. Out of these two life experiences—"I grew up with one and I encountered the other"—she came to frame for herself a uniquely personal way of thinking. Fiercely independent, she had been a problem for her teachers at Bard—"My colors were considered too close together." If Hans Hofmann's animation of surface was evoked with contrasting colors, Trepp avoids any jarring push and pull. She creates a flatter, more subdued, and calmer surface, often using grounds that are slightly similar, slightly different.

In Europe, she began to absorb and understand the Bauhaus aesthetic of combining art and architecture, which had spread worldwide in the famous International Style of steel-and-glass skyscrapers and smaller, geometrically

rational public housing and private homes. The architects who fostered the Bauhaus also extended invitations to notable artists to contribute works for walls or sculpture for open spaces. If the architects were practicing the utilitarian idea that form follows function, the artists followed the idea that what they did was to create forms without function, yet capable of expressing shared feeling. A site-specific piece, by its nature, must speak to the spirit of its place.

## Thalwil Wall Painting, Switzerland

SHE COMPLETED a major commission in 2004 in Thalwil, Switzerland, along Lake Zurich, a historic area in which small farms and day fishing gave way to textile factories and railroad lines, with the factories now themselves defunct. Once again, the village is re-creating itself; Trepp transformed the windowless wall of a four-story building using a simple Bauhaus division of space, taking the vertical shape and creating a column-like margin on the left, as a designer might do in setting the margins for a page of text. On the blank field, Trepp has drawn two trembling lines that strengthen each other in their spring-like relationship, with their backs braced against each other and their feet holding the walls apart. Most curious is how these fissure-like lines suggest physical cracks in the wall, a memento mori that now returns as symbolic support, suggesting that the grand ruins of the past are the foundations of the future.

Trepp's drawing for the wall was selected from one of many small drawings. To enlarge the scale, she gridded the expanse in three-foot squares, so each section of a line could be replicated by a painter on a scaffold working with a stencil, using a firm, round-bristled brush, slightly smaller than the width of the line, for the equivocal control she sought—"no sharp lines—the line was to look like it was moving."

IT MUST HAVE BEEN a strange feeling to watch the enlargement—and slowed production—of a gesture that she had executed with long-considered



UNTITLED (NR. 2009-09-09), 2009, EGG TEMPERA, OIL, AND OIL STICK ON LINEN, 56 BY 39.5 INCHES





THALWIL (WALL PAINTING), 2004, MINERAL PAINT ON EXTERIOR WALL, 355.5 BY 237 INCHES, PHOTO BY PETER VOGELI

and quickly executed markings, done irrevocably whether in charcoal, ink, or oil stick. When she is drawing in her studio, she forbids herself to erase a spontaneous mark. Done is done; the question becomes simple: to preserve or destroy. She will not go back and smudge away a scar.

The drama in Trepp's work is a joust between ground and line. *Beyond Line*, Trepp's title for the PAAM exhibition, suggests that lines can go beyond themselves by contrasting movement and stillness, and showing how these sensations are connected. She said, "Stillness is contained motion. It stops, positively. Or it may be ready to spring to the next motion." She wants her line to be an action on a timeless field. Her art seeks to isolate, honor, and meditate in offering "a momentary stay against confusion," as Robert Frost described the function of a line of memorable poetry. Repose is a moment of stasis, calmness, concentration, organization, comprehension.

If her grounds are painstakingly layered to reflect light like sun shining on water, her drawn lines capture a brief moment in an enduring phenomenon. This is her conscious intention. She dislikes evidence of the brushstroke, preferring "a personal relationship with the material and not with the brush." She

uses only a rag and her hands to rub and burnish the surface until it achieves an understated glow. She took the color scheme of the "Thalwil Wall" from the faded yellow that already existed, and then made her division by shading the yellow with black, on the left, and tinting the same color with white in the area where her drawing is displayed.

We cannot call Trepp's drawing de Kooning-like in any smooth, fluid, expressive tapering; rather, her tracks inch along, little by little, seemingly feeling their way with a snail's stubborn inborn determination. Her impulse comes out of her heritage of expressive gesture, now presented on subtle, inflected grounds.

The brushes she uses to prepare her egg tempera grounds, laying down dozens of layers, are mostly feathers—falcon feathers, chicken feathers, ostrich feathers. "They have their own mark," she said, "and when you cover one layer with another you get, let's say, something like sunlight on moss." The softest feathers, she has learned, come from under the wing of a chicken, and these are the most expensive brushes in Japan, where she travels to obtain this valued tool she needs to invest her work with the feeling of markings made out of primordial emotions. She favors materials, close at hand, that may



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—en here many centuries. She spoke about  
he will dress the linen with many coats of egg  
tempera, so the ground itself becomes activated  
almost as a ceremonial or even sacred space.

## Dynamic Balance

TREPP SELDOM TITLES her work, using a numbering system instead, saying that she chooses “not to channel the viewer’s direction.” But we need a name to evoke the work; for purpose of reference, let us call a drawing done in 2009 “Dynamic Balance.” It shows the silhouette of a figure walking, placing one foot in front of the other, and moving from balance point to balance point. She used “a three-and-a-half inch monster oil stick” in order to make a very thick line suggesting the curvature of the spine and the gesture of a march in motion. The figure’s shadow seems alive in the glow of eternal time.

## The Cloud-like Travel of Mountains

IN AN UNTITLED WORK from 2010, oil and oil stick on egg tempera and linen, the word “abstraction” becomes manifest in its meaning to “select from.” Trepp has taken the motion of clouds and selected indications of mountain ridges, gaps, plummets, and swoops, likening geologic time to weather patterns.

The Swiss author Max Frisch, in his novel *Man in the Holocene*, set on a disintegrating mountaintop, made us aware of the inexorable geologic change, so invisible in our daily dramas. In Zurich, Trepp lives

in view of the snow-covered Alps and the nearby wooded hills. She has watched the movements of clouds over the mountains and has come to find a way to represent the evanescence of clouds as an abstraction of mountain ranges, as if the mountains had given their shapes to the clouds.

Often Trepp will skip continuities in the continuation of a line, fracturing the completion of a line

so that the sense of completion is implied rather than enacted. She offers the viewer the chance to put in the missing area. She likes tension between the implied and the explicit. One way of achieving that is to leave things out or open.

Painting is a strange form because of the way it captures the immediacy of a summarizing moment; yet we still speak of the way a line may “run” across a space. So you get this strange effect of motion in stillness. The relation between tension, harmony, relaxation, tightness, weak and strong, frail and powerful—these contrasts come out, not through colors, but through the placement of the lines on the grounds. In a previous catalogue, Trepp described her aesthetic as “Expressive Minimalism”: “Stillness is, after all, motion in repose.”

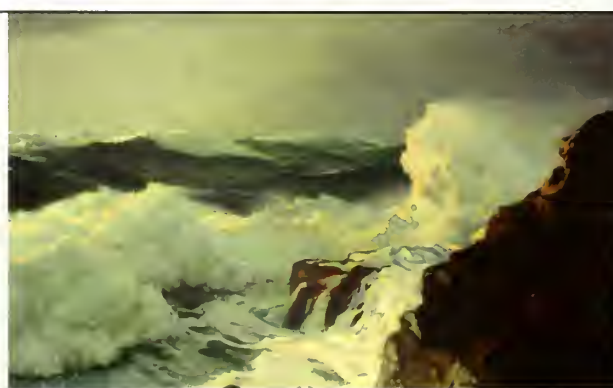
## Tripods

THE THREE-POINT balance consistently utilized in her recent sculptures is a method to organize past, present, and future into three-dimensional perspectives, allowing us to see what is not visible from a single perspective. Her ribbons of steel wind like Möbius strips, showing their backs and fronts as equal surfaces. The ribbons are painted crisp, industrial car colors, and the obverse strip is burnished, the steel brushed to a neutral and natural gray. Much as the grounds function for the field of her drawings, so the back side of her ribbons hold moments in place. In a three-dimensional viewing, the underside is glimpsed like a peek at a secret. Absence is a big part of empty space.

I mentioned to Trepp that a line is not a tonal area. The drama is in the line’s movement—its direction, thrust, energy, speed, snap of synapse, electric jump, or natural inclination.

She said, “If art is successful, it is finished, concluded, standing alone. The artist now becomes the viewer. If it’s there, it’s separate.” ▲

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is publisher of Provincetown Arts.



Frederick Judd Waugh, *Breaking Surf*, detail. Oil on canvas, NBMAA

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# The Whitney Biennial 2012

## WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

By Marc J. Straus

**I AM VISITING THE** Whitney Biennial one month after its opening, and conversation in the art world is eerily quiet. I am not certain of the crowds but when I returned on a Friday, few people were there. One starts from the fourth floor, the largest space in the famous Breuer building, due to be supplanted by a much larger space in the Meatpacking District near Chelsea, and in some ways it seems as if they are already preparing to move.

Most of the fourth floor has been opened up, and there are numerous chairs in a semicircle, cluttered work desks, and a few music stands. They are between performances perhaps, and it isn't clear whether it would be intrusive to cross through to get to the *art* likely in the rear rooms. And back there, in a small room, the video and lights are turned off so as not to disturb the performance in the main space, even though there is no performance. Then two more large rooms, one a theater green room where a woman is speaking in Spanish, presumably about her horrific experiences in Honduras. Next, an empty theater changing room.

Roberta Smith of the *Times*, famously tough and articulate, mostly coddled this Biennial in a lengthy review, lauding its risk-taking and lucid confluence of performance and art. Indeed she points out that performance is the essential ingredient and lauds the rarified choices of visual artists—these curators didn't shop in the usual high-end galleries. To that point, the key artist is Forrest Bess, with numerous works throughout chosen by Robert Gober. Bess died institutionalized with schizophrenia, and here are works that include genital mutilation. Such choices ground this show of often highly personal, idiosyncratic, and even off-putting work. As with most Biennials, perhaps in part it is likely a counter to what came in earlier Biennials. This one is clearly not pandering to the market.

There is a part of me that roots hard for the artist who is not easily commercially viable, so I mostly side with Smith; but I think she omits something essential. She is a full-time, art world presence, sophisticated and generally generously supportive of our art underdogs: performance work and room-size installations. But she clearly spent long hours and multiple days viewing the work or it would not be possible to see and write about so many of the performances. But what of the visitor—the artist, the collector, the tourist who might be neither, who make up the majority of visitors? They would mostly encounter (as I did) empty spaces. They likely will not devote the time needed to see more than one performance, and perhaps none. Except for aficionados such as Smith, who puts in the requisite time?



INSTALLATION VIEWS FEATURING (ABOVE) PAINTINGS BY KAI ALTHOFF, AND HANDWOVEN PANELS BY TRAVIS JOSEF MEINOLF; (BELOW) WERNER HERZOG, INSTALLATION OF *HEARSAY OF THE SOUL*. COURTESY THE WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Who is the audience? It is Smith and a handful of seasoned curators and critics. In this contemporary art world there is great coinage given to such art—highly conceptual and not easily marketable. Indeed it is a quicker ticket for newer galleries applying to such hard-to-get-into art fairs as LISTE in Basel. But at the main fairs such as Art Basel, once galleries have serious space and traction, over 99 percent of what they bring is the fare that will sell—paintings and more-conventional sculpture. That's what buyers buy with few exceptions. In the fair shuffle, where you tend to move quickly through one hundred to three hundred booths, there is often nothing quite like most of the work at the Whitney.

I have a new gallery on the Lower East Side, NYC, and represent a couple of artists who would fit well into this Biennial and I am proud of them. One show up now is by Jong Oh, a new Korean sculptor who has made the best barely visible work since Fred Sandback thirty years ago. But we had little expectation of selling it. And of course galleries can't generally take on very many shows like that (though, surprisingly, we sold a few).

I agree with honoring the work (or at least some of it) shown at the Biennial and admire the courage of its curators, including Jay Sanders, an outside curator, and new to this, who stuck to their guns. Few have before at the Biennial.





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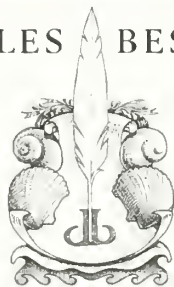
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But I am not certain why this should be *The Biennial*, which was begun as a survey of the best American work at the moment. (Now it's a bit more international.) A full museum show, yes. One that explicates the importance of performance, music, video, sculpture, etc. But not *The Biennial*. In this iteration we have a very hermetic show with a too narrow segment of art.

They have included a few "hot" artists like Nick Mauss. Just before the Biennial opened, he had a show in Chelsea with painting-sculptures; flimsy, mostly wall-hung aluminum works (I bought one). At the Biennial they gave him a large space on the third floor, and he made a double-door entrance gaudily decorated; the media is listed as "cotton appliqué on velvet, door knobs, door stoppers," etc. I did not recognize the work as his, nor did I find it interesting. In that area is work by mostly dead artists including Demuth and Warhol (from the Whitney collection, I believe), and then an interesting weed-trimmer by Michael Smith. Elsewhere, a large room is stuffed with personal belongings of Dawn Kasper, who is on-site to chat about her work—it is part of the deal for three months, and happily some collectors own much of this (I have to look them up).

A couple of mid- to late-career artists got big space, such as Elaine Reichek and Andrew Masullo, the latter with lots of little quirky paintings; and while I like many, I especially like his gallery, Feature

Inc. (NYC), which backed Masullo for years and has also shown Vincent Fecteau's smaller sculptures on plinths, now represented at Matthew Marks and prices are so much higher.

I do applaud that there are artists here without gallery representation. There was an extraordinary film playing by Werner Herzog, which makes a strong case for considering the relationship of theater, film, and visual art. I loved the walls of drawings and the few paintings by Nicole Eisenman (I own her work).

But all in all, this is a Biennial for Ms. Smith and not for 99 percent of visitors. To a large degree it is not even for me, and I see art all the time. Insightful linkages no doubt are clear in the heads of the curators, but for most of us we just don't have access to this information. I am not for dumbing down art—the Whitney has done that all too often. But this is a narrow insider's Biennial. I think they must pay attention to the huge public and make the show more accessible. Empty cavernous spaces? It's a bit like going to see *The Book of Mormon* and the theater is empty. ☹

MARC J. STRAUS is a well-known art collector, a medical oncologist, and the author of three poetry collections from *TriQuarterly Books*—Northwestern University Press. He has written often for this magazine and other art journals. In September he opened MARC STRAUS, a contemporary art gallery on the Lower East Side, NYC.



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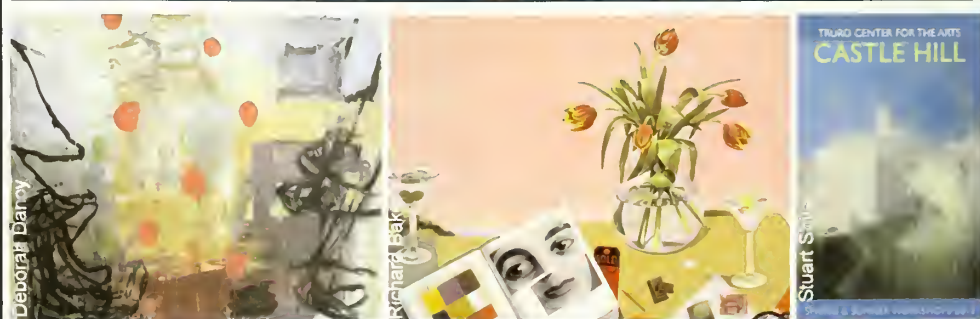


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# de Kooning: A Retrospective

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

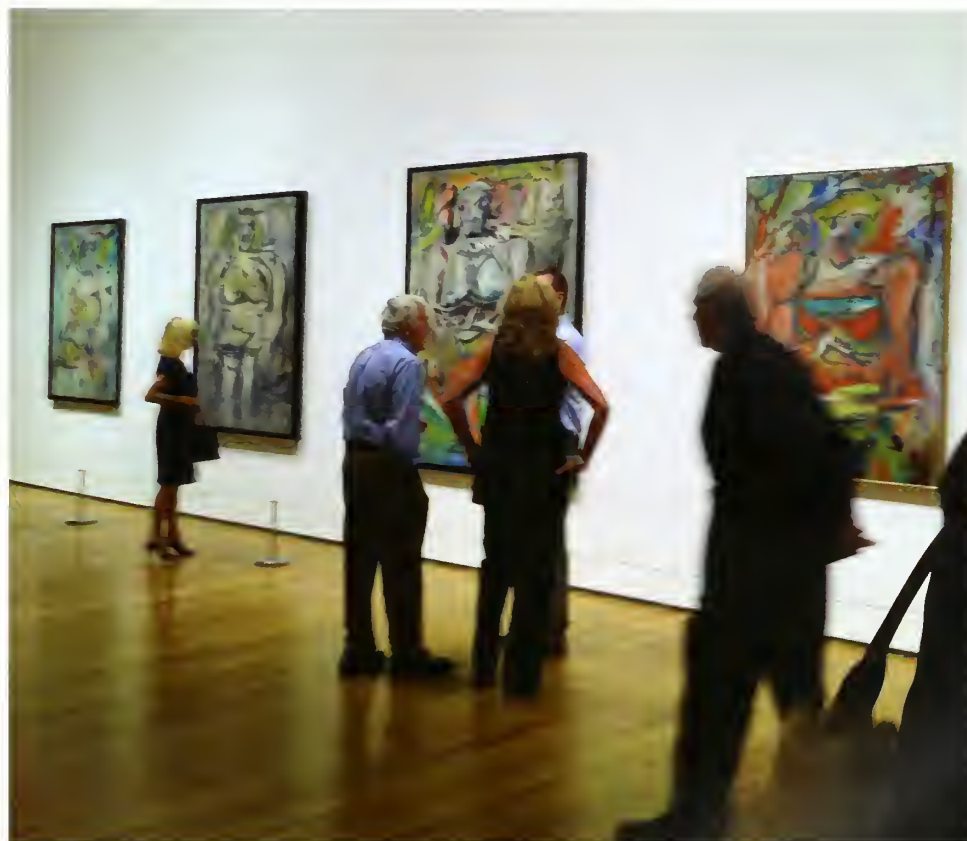
SEPTEMBER 18, 2011–JANUARY 9, 2012

By Helen A. Harrison

**T**HERE'S NO CATALOGUE raisonné for the work of Willem de Kooning (1904–1997), but it's safe to say that in his seven decades-long career he created thousands of paintings, drawings, collages, prints, and sculptures. Some of them were the product of numerous revisions—most famously *Woman, 1* of 1950–52—taking months and even years to complete, while others appear to have been dashed off in minutes. They vary in style from academically precise to expressionistically abstract, with detours into biomorphic surreality, classic Cubism, and Baroque lyricism. They are simultaneously analytical and intuitive, calculated and uninhibited, exquisitely crafted and brazenly crude.

To do justice to such a protean artist in a mere 17,000 square feet of gallery space (the Museum of Modern Art's entire sixth floor) would be impossible, but MoMA came as close to it as we're ever likely to see with last fall's retrospective exhibition of some two hundred examples. Organized by John Elderfield, the museum's chief curator emeritus of painting and sculpture, the show was greeted with near-universal acclaim, and despite a few misgivings I have to agree that it affirmed de Kooning's ranking at the forefront of the Abstract Expressionist pantheon. Notwithstanding his contrarian devotion to the human figure at a time when figurative art was frowned upon by his fellow avant-gardists, de Kooning was so respected that his apostasy was grudgingly accepted and ultimately forgiven.

What accounts for this? According to Thomas B. Hess, the *Art News* editor who wrote the first monograph on the artist, de Kooning's iconoclasm and eloquence combined to earn him respect in the 1940s, when the New York School, as Robert Motherwell dubbed it, was in ascendance. His aesthetic authority stemmed from a combination of reverence for the problems that have faced all painters, representational and abstract alike, since painting began, and the conviction that painting's very raison d'être had changed radically and irreversibly in the mid-twentieth century. This "crisis of modern art" involved looking at everything afresh, so by definition that process had to be inclusive. The omnivorous eye scrutinizes all visual data with equal interest and finds the same challenges in so-called pure painting and in abstracting from nature. De Kooning's unwillingness to exclude anything—from a crack in the sidewalk to the curve of a shoulder—that might have pictorial potential was a troublesome reminder that even the most subjectively motivated



AT THE OPENING OF THE MOMA EXHIBITION

artist receives stimuli from the outside world as well as the creative unconscious.

This is not to imply that de Kooning was self-satisfied with that position. His explorations typically involved a lot of uncertainty, trial and error, and reappraisal; his vision was revision. He famously referred to himself as "a slipping glimser," a painter who paradoxically felt most comfortable when he was off balance. "When I'm falling," he remarked in 1960, "I am doing all right. And when I am slipping, I say, 'Hey, this is very interesting.'" By that time he was well established as the most respected and most widely imitated painter of his generation in America, although he was not yet an American citizen. (Sailing from his native Holland in 1926, he managed to obtain entry papers in Boston and lived in the United States as an undocumented immigrant until he was granted citizenship in 1962, a situation that may be seen as a further destabilizing influence.)

In spite of his stated preference for imbalance, I see balance as the signal metaphor of de Kooning's artistic enterprise, and of the MoMA exhibition itself.

The show maintained its equilibrium by presenting his seesaw shifts from representation to abstraction in parallel rather than divergent courses. The earliest pieces, from his student days in the Netherlands and soon after his emigration, made it clear that even when he was working as a commercial artist and decorator he was simultaneously a skillful academic draftsman and a keen observer of modern art trends. With equal assurance, he could render a still life accurately, or abstract it à la Matisse.

In the 1930s the WPA Federal Art Project enabled de Kooning to quit his day job and concentrate on fine art. (Owing to his alien status, he had to leave the project after about a year and a half, but the professional connections he forged later led to a job as a muralist for the 1939 New York World's Fair.) In those years he worked closely with Arshile Gorky, whose obsessive analysis of European Modernist developments helped de Kooning grapple with the basic concepts of picture making. Alternating between figure study and nonobjective formalism, his paintings, mural sketches, and drawings of the



continue a dialogue that aims to resolve this mystery—an endeavor that fortunately never succeeded. At a time when purists insisted on an either-or approach, he was unwilling to take sides. In 1947–48, when the argument was at its most intense, he was painting stark black-and-white abstractions such as *Orestes* and *Dark Pond* while also coming out with his second “Women” series, represented at MoMA by *Pink Lady*, *Woman*, and several works on paper.

I’m far from alone in believing that 1948–1955 marks the high point of de Kooning’s achievement, and this exhibition didn’t change my mind. The masterpieces from those years were there in force, including *Excavation*, *Attic*, and *Asheville*, supreme demonstrations of his ability to combine observation,


sensation, analysis, and invention, and six of the monstrous (and monstrously controversial) *Woman* paintings that to this day divide de Kooning’s admirers and detractors. Volumes have already been written about these grotesques; suffice it to say that they never looked better than they did at MoMA, lined up like beauty pageant contestants from Hell.

For whatever psychological or aesthetic reasons, the misshapen female figure continued to preoccupy de Kooning for decades, but in tandem with compositions that lack overt figurative references. Not that the real world was excluded from canvases like *Gotham News* and *Easter Monday*, in which he retained offset text and photos from the newspapers he used to blot their surfaces. As with the “Women,” where schematic but recognizable body parts give coherence to what otherwise would look like disorganized explosions of paint, these fragments anchor the abstractions in familiar imagery. In the late 1950s, however, de Kooning expunged those elements and embarked on a series of gestural canvases, of which *Bolton Landing* and *Door to the River* are the strongest in a weak field, that reference the work of his friend Franz Kline. With their painterly panache and apparent spontaneity, they’re high on energy but low on unifying structure. This problem would resurface in the 1970s, when de Kooning adopted a congested, visceral approach to all-over abstraction that gave the paintings an arbitrary quality at odds with his fabled perfectionism.

After his move to East Hampton in 1963, de Kooning revisited the female figure in a long series

of women in the water and on the beach. He was fascinated by the shimmering reflections of wading figures, typified by *Clam Diggers*, and by the analogies between the contours of flesh and landscape. Lavish brushwork and sensuous line characterize his paintings and drawings of women on the dunes and in rowboats, usually with their legs splayed open to advertise their sexual availability. These curvaceous, sunstruck hussies are even more mutilated than his 1950s women but arguably a lot more appealing. Part archetype, part caricature, they seem to have stepped out of a Fellini film.

In an unfortunate excursion into sculpture in the late 1960s, de Kooning translated the human body, male and female, into lumpen clay distortions that were not improved by enlargement. (Mercifully, MoMA showed none of those bronze blow-ups.) Reviewing an exhibition of the sculptures in 1983, *New York Times* art critic John Russell observed that they displayed “an element almost of exasperation, as if sculpture were something that had to be tried but should be got over with as soon as possible.” Nevertheless, despite his reservations, Russell praised their antic quality and the “frenetic oddities of posture” so characteristic of de Kooning, although he felt they lacked the “rightness and inevitability” of his paintings and drawings. In the MoMA installation, a group of the first small efforts, made in Rome in 1969, looked charming in a display case. But the larger examples from the 1970s, such as *Cross-Legged Figure* and *Large Torso*, exposed the artist’s lack of innate feeling for three-dimensional form. That said, the grouping and placement in the gallery, where the sculptures and paintings complemented one another, presented them in a highly sympathetic context.

It seems to me that de Kooning’s entire career was a balancing act. Or maybe a pendulum, with its regular alternation from one extreme to the other, is a better analogy. As visitors progressed through the judicious selection of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and prints in MoMA’s brilliantly installed galleries, they saw the artist’s clock winding down and the swings becoming less pronounced, until they resolved in a series of biomorphic abstractions that distill the essence of his vision. To me, paintings like *Untitled VI* (1986) and *Conversation* represent a kind of X-ray view of his earlier work’s skeletal structure. Toward the end, his glimpse slipped ever more inward, and became ever more penetrating. But this exhibition didn’t tell the whole story of that interior journey. The curator chose to exclude work from 1988 to 1990, the last three years of de Kooning’s productive life, when he painted more than fifty canvases while succumbing to senile dementia. Several of them are documented in Edvard Lieber’s revealing monograph *Willem de Kooning: Reflections in the Studio* (Abrams, 2000). A full retrospective assessment won’t be possible until those paintings are seen. 

HELEN A. HARRISON, director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center in East Hampton, New York, is a former *New York Times* art critic and the coauthor of *Hamp-ton’s Bohemia: Two Centuries of Artists and Writers on the Beach*. Her monograph on Pollock is forthcoming from Phaidon Press. A short version of this review appeared in the *Sag Harbor Express* on September 22, 2011.

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# Provincetown and Worpswede

## TWO HISTORIC ARTISTS' COLONIES IN THEIR SECOND CENTURY

By Richard Pettit

**WITH THE REALIZATION** this past year of *The Tides of Provincetown: Pivotal Years in America's Oldest Continuous Art Colony (1899–2011)*, a prominent and comprehensive exhibition at the New Britain Museum of American Art and this summer at the Cape Cod Museum of Art, new interest has focused on the history of the Provincetown artists' colony, and the time seems ripe to view it from a comparative perspective.

When I first visited Provincetown some fifteen years ago, I was struck by the remarkable atmosphere of the town and its surroundings, and was reminded of a town in Germany, Worpswede, which, like Provincetown, has also evolved as an artists' colony. Both locations have a certain magic about them that seems to emanate from the beauty of their natural surroundings combined with the extraordinary diversity and richness of the art they have produced over the past century. The idea of comparing the two colonies began to germinate in my mind: both colonies were founded at roughly the same time, around 1900; both attracted a wide variety of successful painters and writers over the next one hundred years; and both continue to thrive today. Their founding was part of a widespread trend in the art world toward the formation of rural communities of artists, beginning in France in the early and mid-1800s and gradually spreading throughout Europe and into America. In looking at this trend today, we gain insights into the current international phenomenon of artists' colonies, which today have spread all over the globe and number in the thousands.

**WHEN WE CONSIDER** the dozens of rural artists' colonies that took shape at the end of the nineteenth century on either side of the Atlantic, and their lasting impact on the world of art, Provincetown and Worpswede do in fact emerge as two of the most significant in terms of their rich artistic heritage and their relevance today as centers of culture. In comparing the two, we also gain a glimpse into the ongoing artistic exchange between Europe and America, and how this exchange influenced the early unfolding of artists' colonies in this country.

Worpswede (pronounced *Vorpsváyda*) is a small town in northern Germany, located on low, flat moorland northeast of the city of Bremen. The surrounding landscape is crisscrossed by canals and dotted by thatched-roof farmhouses and occasional windmills, giving it a distinctively Dutch or Danish flavor. Worpswede began to attract artists, primarily landscape painters, in the 1880s, and in 1895 it burst onto the German art scene when the original five founding members, Fritz Mackensen, Otto Modersohn, Fritz Overbeck, Hans am Ende, and Heinrich Vogeler, exhibited for the first time together at the prestigious annual international *Glaspalast* (Glass Palace) art show in Munich, where they achieved unprecedented success. This exhibition put Worpswede on the map of modern European art history, where it has remained and flourished ever since.

Despite their initial success and the fact that their works are now in the collections of nearly all the leading German art museums, none of these original founding members of the Worpswede colony, with the possible exception of Heinrich Vogeler and Otto Modersohn, achieved lasting international recognition. Interestingly, the same could be said of the Provincetown colony's early members, Charles Hawthorne, Ambrose Webster, Ross Moffett, and Blanche Lazzell, to name the most prominent artists. There's also a remarkable similarity in the paintings of Charles Hawthorne, the founder in 1899 of the Cape Cod School of Art and of the Provincetown colony itself, and those of Fritz Mackensen, generally considered to be the founder of the Worpswede colony. Both were drawn to the simple farmers/fishermen



THE BARKENHOFF WAS THE HOME AND WORKPLACE OF ARTIST HEINRICH VOGELER FROM 1895 TO 1923 AND BECAME THE CENTER OF SOCIAL LIFE FOR THE WORPSWEDE ARTISTS' COLONY DURING THIS PERIOD. TODAY, IT HOUSES THE HEINRICH VOGELER MUSEUM.

of their respective communities and featured them in many paintings. Ironically, the talent of the one Worpswede artist from this period who did achieve resounding international fame, Paula Modersohn-Becker, the wife of the landscape painter and founding member Otto Modersohn, was totally unrecognized during her lifetime. She exhibited her work once in 1899 at the Bremer Kunsthalle, received a devastating review, and did not show her work again publicly before she died tragically after childbirth at the age of thirty-one in 1907. She is now recognized as one of the major representatives of early German Expressionism.

An artist closely associated with Provincetown who did become internationally recognized happened, as it turns out, to be from Germany. Hans Hofmann, a leading proponent of Abstract Expressionism and an inspiring teacher of many renowned American artists, was part of the sizeable wave of European artists coming to American shores for political reasons during the 1930s and 1940s. Hofmann started his artistic career in Munich, emigrated to the United States in 1932, and founded in 1935 a summer school in Provincetown, which thrived until 1958 and attracted many of the major young talents of the time. Looking back over the first century of the Provincetown colony, Hofmann stands out as one of the most, if not the most, prominent artists connected with Provincetown, and was certainly the colony's single most significant tie to Europe.

The period around 1900 was the heyday for European artists' colonies in general, including those in France, Germany, Denmark, Hungary, Russia, and England. Three veterans of the European colonies who later settled in Provincetown were John Noble, Max Bohm, and Frederick Waugh. Due in part to their exposure to European artists' colonies, and in part for the same reasons that European artists moved away from big cities, American artists also began to establish rural colonies around 1900. Like their European counterparts, they were motivated by a desire to escape city life, commune directly with nature, and paint *en plein air*; to be part of, and exchange ideas with, a small group of like-minded artists; and to free themselves of the traditional views and academic regimentation of the art academies.

At the same time, there was a corresponding shift of artistic taste that created a market for works depicting the natural surroundings of these rural colonies. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 also contributed to the growth of artists' colonies on this side of the Atlantic, since American artists were then cut off from Europe, and could not return to the colonies they had





THE PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION AND MUSEUM PHOTO BY ANTON GRASSL

been frequenting till then. Most of these American communities were located in the Northeast, near the major population centers, many of them along the Atlantic coast.

Provincetown and Worswede were clearly not isolated phenomena. In fact they share many salient characteristics with the other European and American colonies. They are both decidedly rural communities, founded in small towns surrounded by a natural, breathtakingly beautiful landscape. Both were founded spontaneously around a small group of visual artists, primarily landscape/seascape painters; both flourished and became well-known early on, establishing art schools, museums, and many commercial galleries. More recently, both have launched state and municipality supported residential grant programs to support international contemporary artists. The Fine Arts Work Center was founded in Provincetown in 1968 and now attracts an astounding array of talented visual artists and writers from around the globe. The Künstlerhäuser Worswede (Worswede artists' residences), established in 1971 and the first of their kind in Germany, have flourished similarly, providing creative residential opportunities to hundreds of international artists, writers, and musicians.

A wide array of art galleries and museums have contributed significantly to the cultural development of these two towns, the most prominent being the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (PAAM), founded in 1914, and the Worsweder Kunsthalle, founded in 1919. Both institutions have a rich and varied history, played a major role in promoting and establishing the reputation of the art produced in their respective colonies, and both have distinguished themselves with impressive exhibitions that reach beyond their respective geographic and artistic borders.

Prominent artists, primarily visual artists, but also some poets, playwrights, and novelists, have played a major role in the founding and development of both colonies. Provincetown attracted major writers, such as Norman Mailer, and the poets Stanley Kunitz and Mary Oliver. Worswede's literary tradition was more limited; however, it was home briefly to the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, whose monograph about the five original founding artists,

*Worswede* (1903), contributed significantly to the initial and lasting fame of the colony. Rilke first visited Worswede as the guest of Heinrich Vogeler in 1898, and later married one of the colony's artists, the sculptress Clara Westhoff. He was also very close to Paula Modersohn-Becker, who painted a now-famous portrait of the poet in 1906. Her tragic death the following year inspired one of his most memorable and moving long poems, *Requiem für eine Freundin* ("Requiem for a Woman"), in 1908. Rilke is now recognized as one of the greatest twentieth-century poets of the German language.

As self-contained and geographically isolated as these two colonies may appear to be, they were influenced and shaped by the major visual art movements of the twentieth century, including Impressionism, Jugendstil (the German variant of Art Nouveau), Expressionism, Cubism, Modernism, Abstract Modernism, and Abstract Expressionism. Cultural and political movements left their mark as well on the two communities and can be recognized in the engagement of individual artists in these movements. The journalist, poet, and Communist activist Jack Reed and his wife, the writer and feminist Louise Bryant, were friends of Eugene O'Neill and spent several summers in Provincetown, from 1916 to 1918, becoming involved with the artistic community here.

In Germany, Heinrich Vogeler, one of the founders of the Worswede colony and a successful Jugendstil artist around 1900, became a dedicated socialist at the end of World War I, and later converted his beautifully restored farmhouse and garden in Worswede, the Barkenhoff, which previously had been the center of the colony's artistic social life, into a workers' commune and school for German revolutionaries. Vogeler remained politically engaged, emigrating later to the Soviet Union and developing a whole new Socialist Realism phase to his art. His biography, a testimony to his passion for art combined with strong political beliefs, stands out as one of the most fascinating of all the European artists who lived through the turbulent first half of the twentieth century. At the other end of the political spectrum, two prominent founding members of the Worswede colony, Fritz Mackensen and Otto Modersohn, were more inclined toward the Blut und Boden (blood and earth) ideology of the National Socialists, and were later celebrated by the Nazis.

There are also some obvious differences between these two colonies and the ways they developed, perhaps the most important one being the prominence of the theatrical arts, parallel to the visual arts, in the cultural history of Provincetown. With the founding of the Provincetown Players in 1916, and the early involvement of playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and, somewhat later, Tennessee Williams, a strong theatrical tradition was established that continues today. Worswede did not produce such a tradition. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, Provincetown attracted a growing population of Portuguese immigrants, who have had a significant impact on the town's cultural development, as has since the mid-twentieth century the growing gay community. In contrast, Worswede's core population was initially, and has remained, largely German.

Other differences stem from the size, location, and physical surroundings of the two towns. Worswede, originally a farming village with peat harvesting as its economic base, is smaller than Provincetown and more isolated, situated on the low, flat Teufelsmoor (Devil's Moor), northeast of Bremen, while Provincetown, a whaling and fishing port for many years with a history stretching back to the arrival of the Pilgrims in the New World in 1620, is surrounded by the sea, famous now for its long beaches and spectacular sand dunes, and is characterized by its strong ties to the urban and intellectual centers of New York and Boston.

Finally, in comparing Provincetown and Worswede, it's crucial to discuss their value today—especially in a world economy that often dismisses art and artists, more and more frequently cutting funding for grants and programs supporting the arts. Not only do these colonies survive despite this difficult financial climate, they flourish. Through two world wars and various economic upheavals, they continue to be as relevant in the present as they were a hundred years ago, when they were founded (even as more famous colonies no longer attract contemporary artists). They are still vital centers contributing to both their regional and national cultural heritage.

And what draws contemporary artists to these two colonies today? Part of the allure and vitality of these towns is the link that has evolved between the artistic community and the steady stream of "cultural tourists," drawn to the combination of art and nature that each of these venues offers. We see a historic tradition of artistic continuity, a tradition much more diverse than it was a century ago, and for this reason now perhaps more appealing than ever. These are exemplars, evolving and unique. A standard to be celebrated and, hopefully, emulated in the rest of the world. ▴

RICHARD PETTIT is an independent scholar, writer, and translator living in Washington, DC. This article results from a larger research project, comparing European and American artists' colonies, and specifically Provincetown and Worswede. While living in Germany, Pettit wrote a book in German about the poet Rilke's connection to Worswede, *Rainer Maria Rilke und seine Künstlerfreunde in Worswede*, third edition, Worsweder Kunststiftung Friedrich Netzel, 2001.



COVER FEATURE

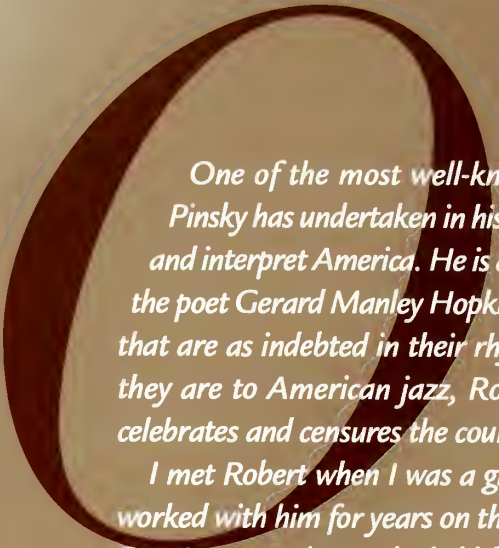


# The Instrument of Voice

## AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT PINSKY

By Maggie Dietz





*One of the most well-known and respected poets of our time, Robert Pinsky has undertaken in his forty-year career no smaller task than to observe and interpret America. He is an artist less interested in landscape than in what the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins called inscape. In muscular, energetic poems that are as indebted in their rhythms to seventeenth-century English poetry as they are to American jazz, Robert writes an American amalgam that both celebrates and censures the country's vibrant, messy cultural variety.*

*I met Robert when I was a graduate student at Boston University, and then worked with him for years on the Favorite Poem Project, his undertaking as US Poet Laureate (a post he held for an unprecedented three terms, from 1997 to 2000). Over the course of a year, we collected letters and e-mails from 18,000 Americans about poems they love; and over the next several years, we culled the best of these letters, along with the chosen poems, into three print anthologies and a series of fifty, short video documentaries featuring, for example, a Boston construction worker, a Georgia Supreme Court justice, and a California teen whose family had fled the Cambodian genocide. (The videos can be viewed online at [www.favoritepoem.org](http://www.favoritepoem.org).)*

*During the laureateship and since, Robert has arguably done more to engage the American audience for poetry than any other living poet. And yet, he insists that poetry doesn't need a spokesperson, that the art—the pleasures of a poem's sounds, the human hunger to experience things on an individual scale—advocates for itself.*

*In person, Robert embodies an anomaly: his easy demeanor is the product of formidable intelligence and confidence. He's at once down-to-earth and larger-than-life. His friend the artist Michael Mazur insisted he's the spitting image of the actor Sam Waterston from Law and Order. Years ago, at a Favorite Poem event, a woman who'd seen Robert's appearances on the PBS News-Hour approached me and said, "I always thought Robert Pinsky was very tall." Robert is not particularly short, but it seemed that this woman, who'd pictured him at six foot five or so, just couldn't believe her eyes. It was as if she wanted me to offer some explanation. I didn't, but I might have said, "He has a tall voice."*

*Robert reads poems aloud with intensity, emphasizing plosives and sometimes rocking unconsciously on his toes at the podium. It's entrancing to see and hear him, in part because he seems to be speaking from inside the poems, his voice propelled by the force of words—whether his own or Wallace Stevens's or Walter Savage Landor's. To hear Robert read is to hear a translation from shapes on paper to sounds in air, in the voice of someone who has no agenda but fidelity to the sounds as his ears hear them. In his reading style—its intensity and directness without pretension—one sees qualities of Robert's more general presence and of his writing.*

*I hope this interview demonstrates these qualities, as well as how much fun it is to talk to him.*





PAGE 109: PINSKY READING AT THE FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE LA POESIA, NICARAGUA, 2012  
PHOTO © RENE FIGUEROA

LEFT: BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND ROBERT PINSKY TALK AND PERFORM AT THE 2010 LITERARY AND MUSIC FESTIVAL WAMFEST AT FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY, 2010  
PHOTO © DAVID GRABYN

BELOW: PINSKY IN HIS CAMBRIDGE HOME  
PHOTO BY PHIL SMITH

**MAGGIE DIETZ** You grew up in Long Branch, New Jersey, a once-famous resort town whose regular visitors included President Ulysses S. Grant in the late nineteenth century. Some of that social luster had faded before your childhood, but your attachment to your hometown—even especially to its vibrancy in decline—is evident in your poems, and in the way you talk about the place. How did the town shape the man?

**ROBERT PINSKY** Grant, Garfield, Lincoln. But also prizefighters, actors, gamblers—the firehouse I walked by on my way to school was named the “Phil Daly Ladder and Hose,” endowed by the noted gambler. Diamond Jim Brady took Lillian Russell to Long Branch. Eugene O’Neill’s father, who played the Count of Monte Cristo a jillion times, had a summer house in the town. Jack Dempsey trained in Long Branch. Winslow Homer painted the town and did drawings of the crowds there on assignment for *Harper’s Magazine*. In the Museum of Fine Arts, here in Boston, you can see Homer’s wonderful painting *Long Branch, New Jersey*—the women with their parasols and little dog, up on the bluffs I know well, above the ocean.

In the nineteenth century, families of the now-extinct “High Society” summered in Newport, Rhode Island, or in Saratoga Springs, New York. In contrast, Long Branch was where the patent-medicine millionaires and show-business people went. High Society was the old idea; in Long Branch a more modern idea evolved: the social power of money and fame that replaced the social power of “birth,” meaning ancestry. Celebrity was born in Long Branch.

I was aware of growing up in an historic place—but also that it was history with a raffish, coarse or showy side. More Groucho than T. S. Eliot. And when I grew up in Long Branch, it was no longer the place of Winslow Homer and President Grant or even of Eugene O’Neill’s successful ham of a father, but rather a place of mostly working-class ethnic groups: certain black, Irish, Italian families had known my Jewish family for two or three generations. Some of them drank in my grandfather’s bar. Some of them had bought liquor from him during Prohibition. Some of them had been his colleagues or rivals in bootlegging. The groups also had in common that we were not summer people . . . a similarity to the Cape, I guess.

So, I grew up with a “sense of history” in many senses, none of them strictly academic. That may have shaped me and my writing.

**MD** You and your family go to Truro in the summer. How would you compare the Cape’s landscape and culture to the Jersey Shore’s?

**RP** Bluefish and clams and other good things to eat that come out of the Atlantic. Insular old-timers. Proximity to a city, and a certain remove from it. I wonder if you could say that the Cape is to the Vineyard as I just said Long Branch was to Newport or Saratoga Springs? The Jersey Shore doesn’t have the literary or artistic history that the Outer Cape has—Edmund Wilson,

Robert Motherwell, Hans Hofmann, and all that . . . but our pizza is superior. And come to think of it, Edmund Wilson (like Count Basie) was born in Red Bank, the town next to Long Branch.

(An old-time, thigh-slapping Monmouth County joke: “Was it the Red Bank Branch of the Long Branch Bank, or the Long Branch Branch of the Red Bank Bank?” Ha-ha, we used to say.)

**MD** When we were working on the *Favorite Poem Project* together, you’d sometimes say, “Let’s do this the Long Branch way,” which usually meant call a guy who knows a guy who knows something about, say, fenders, or, in our case, fund-raising. Can you elaborate?

**RP** Certain pursuits and occupations and places lead to knowing people. My father’s father was a bartender. My father, Milford Pinsky, was a noted local athlete and optician. He and I both grew up on Rockwell Avenue, and we had the same homeroom teacher. My dad made eyeglasses for the plumber who fixed our toilet, and the guy who sold him cars got his glasses from him, and the chief of police used to work for Milford’s father, Dave Pinsky, in the whisky-running days. We ate at Nunzio’s Pizzeria, and Nunzio Chiafullo lived across the street. The football coach and Spanish teacher, Army Ippolito, had been a protégé of Dave Pinsky’s.

So I was raised to respect friendship and personal relations more than rules or official requirements and procedures and institutions. I tend not





to organizations and committees; often those kinds of bodies don't like to go to Berkeley, at an academic dinner party, I once got an inadvertent laugh. When somebody asked me:

"Can it be true, Robert, that you lied on an official form, so Lenny Michael's son could go to the Berkeley middle school?"

"Well yes," I said. "Lenny lives in Kensington and he wanted Daniel to go to school in Berkeley, so we went to City Hall and filled out the form saying Danny was my nephew and he lived with Ellen and me, at our Berkeley address."

"You *signed* that? You lied on an official form for Lenny? How could you do that?"

I thought about my father and mother, their families and friends, and how it would be a disgrace not to do something like that for a friend. I realized there was a difference in morals or mores. So I said: "I guess it depends on how you were brought up," and they all laughed—though I wasn't trying to be funny.

That mentality—small-town, or lower-middle-class, or tribal, whatever you call it—may have helped create the Favorite Poem Project, with its emphasis on the personal more than the organizational, on experience rather than authority, quirks rather than forms, personal attachments to works of art rather than statistics. The readers in the videos at [www.favoritepoem.org](http://www.favoritepoem.org) and in our anthologies, like *An Invitation to Poetry*, are, by design, *readers* . . . not poets or critics or professors of poetry.

The FPP is not the project—with all due respect to institutions—of a foundation or a society or an academy. Those FPP videos and the FPP anthologies have a relation to "ordinary" people that comes, in a certain sense, from Long Branch.

There are limitations—my limitations!—to a way of doing things that is more intuitive than organizational. So while Green Bay, Wisconsin, may be your Long Branch equivalent, Maggie, the project probably also required the organizational skills of a young poet who was raised as a Catholic and whose father was a judge. You are bilingual: you can speak both Small Town and Get Organized.

**MD** *Part of the ethos of your childhood and adolescence in New Jersey, I gather, was a sense that there were certain people who had your back. Your mother seems to have been an exception. Some of your poems (such as "The Green Piano" and "Poem with Refrains") refer to the head injury she suffered that changed her personality, and to her erratic moods and behavior. Are there ways that an unpredictable home life contributed to the self-reliance or improvisation it would take to write poems, to decide to become a poet?*

**RP** Sylvia Pinsky graduated from Long Branch High School, where she met Milford—but she was born in Arkansas, raised partly in Oregon, partly in Brooklyn and other places. Her expression for her family's moves in her childhood was "one jump ahead of the sheriff." Even before her fall and the concussion, she knew how to rail eloquently, and a bit madly, against Long Branch and its provinciality. Also, she railed against my father for landing her in the wrong part of the town. She was a reader of sci-fi, a racer through the *Times* crossword puzzle, an acerbic wit, a non-preparer of meals, a brooder. An ardent New Deal liberal. She drew well, loved opera, made enemies easily.

The title poem of *History of My Heart* is a tribute to her force. In the poem, I entertain the idea that her laughter and intensity and diffuse rebellion against the world were formative.

The years of her concussion affected family life, perhaps creating some odd Pinsky family values I may have inherited. Improvising. Finding a way to fit disparate things together. Escaping from the straightforward while craving it from the outside. Comic timing. Retreat into laughter. Indirection. Seeing from odd angles. Talking. Racing between the poles of destruction and creativity. Gossip. Music. Complaining and schmoozing. At its worst, despair and defensive sneers. At its best, invention and generous laughter. When I hear politicians talk about "Family Values," that is some of what flashes through my mind.

**MD** *The first time I heard you read—at Northwestern University in 1993—I remember being transfixed by the poem "Ginza Samba." You play the saxophone, tinker on the piano, and aspired as a young man to be a musician. You count Charlie Parker among your literary influences. How did the move from jazz to poetry—genres you've recently combined, as we'll talk about—happen?*

## Ginza Samba

A monosyllabic European called Sax  
Invents a horn, walla whirledy wah, a kind of twisted  
Brazen clarinet, but with its column of vibrating  
Air shaped not in a cylinder but in a cone  
Widening ever outward and bawaah spouting  
Infinitely upward through an upturned  
Swollen golden bell rimmed  
Like a gloxinia flowering  
In Sax's Belgian imagination

And in the unfathomable matrix  
Of mothers and fathers as a genius graven  
Humming into the cells of the body  
Or saved cupped in the resonating grail  
Of memory changed and exchanged  
As in the trading of brasses,  
Pearls and ivory, calicos and slaves,  
Laborers and girls, two

Cousins in a royal family  
Of Niger known as the Birds or Hawks.  
In Christendom one cousin's child  
Becomes a "favorite negro" ennobled  
By decree of the Czar and founds  
A great family, a line of generals,  
Dandies and courtiers including the poet  
Pushkin, killed in a duel concerning  
His wife's honor, while the other cousin sails

In the belly of a slaveship to the port  
Of Baltimore where she is raped  
And dies in childbirth, but the infant  
Will marry a Seminole and in the next  
Chorus of time their child fathers  
A great Hawk or Bird, with many followers  
Among them this great-grandchild of the Jewish  
Manager of a Pushkin estate, blowing

His American breath out into the wiggly  
Tune uncurling its triplets and sixteenths—the Ginza  
Samba of breath and brass, the reed  
Vibrating as a valve, the aether, the unimaginable  
Wires and circuits of an ingenious box  
Here in my room in this house built  
A hundred years ago while I was elsewhere:

It is like falling in love, the atavistic  
Imperative of some one  
Voice or face—the skill, the copper filament,  
The golden bellful of notes twirling through  
Their invisible element from  
Rio to Tokyo and back again gathering  
Speed in the variations as they tunnel  
The twin haunted labyrinths of stirrup  
And anvil echoing here in the hearkening  
Instrument of my skull.

*from Selected Poems, copyright Robert Pinsky,  
published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux*





POEMJAZZ: ROBERT PINSKY AND LAURENCE HOBGOOD PHOTO BY ERIC ANTONIOU

**RP** The simple answer is, I was not musical enough for a career. (In the Long Branch High yearbook, I am voted “Most Musical Boy.” The photographer has posed me blowing a trumpet, an instrument I never played. Possibly a prophetic image?) But through difficult high-school years, I made money playing the saxophone, and it gave me a social identity. It was my one success. In college, with great teachers like Paul Fussell and Francis Ferguson, I soon turned from trying to make musical sounds toward the sounds of words.

**MD** You recently recorded a CD with the pianist Laurence Hobgood, *POEMJAZZ*, and will do a show with him in Truro in August. Over the past few years, you’ve performed with several jazz musicians and ensembles, but not in the traditional beatnik way of reading poems with jazz accompaniment. You’ve said that onstage you are another instrument. How does that work?

**RP** Pitch and duration, along with rhythm, are important in spoken sentences as they are in music. In Frost’s great short essay “The Figure a Poem Makes,” his term “sentence sounds,” the very essence of the art, describes the melodies of speech. William Carlos Williams writes about the same vital shapes of utterance. A manic, rigid devotion to meter seems cuckoo to me, as though you approached music by concentrating on time signatures and notation. The word *form* should include the great range of elements that make sentence-sounds, not just patterns like sonnet and sestina.

That’s what poetry is for me: an art of pitch, quantity, and rhythm in language: a sister or close cousin of song, but not the same as song.

In *POEMJAZZ* the sentence-sounds of the poems interact with the music. What I try to do with Laurence Hobgood, as we listen to one another, is to be like a horn player, with the lines of the poem as my horn. Laurence isn’t playing mood music for me as though I were an actor: we’re playing music together. I’m not singing, but I’m speaking with attention to pitch and cadence. On the *POEMJAZZ* CD, you often can hear that we are in the same key.

**MD** And is it fun to be part of the band?

**RP** A tremendous pleasure, related to the joy I felt playing an instrument in my teens and twenties, making music with other people. It’s a pleasure I thought was long behind me, something of my youth. Now, I have a version of it back again, through the instrument of my voice.

**MD** You can’t jam onstage, right? I know you revise your poems heavily after you’ve written them. But maybe revision is akin to practicing an instrument, the capacity for improvisation achieved only with a certain level of mastery. How much is “jamming” part of your writing process?

**RP** In a sense, writing is improvisation if it’s any good: every departure from convention or expectation is like the informed departure of improvisation, simultaneously free and systematic. In fact, to keep the poem alive in relation to the music, in performance, I do vary repetitions, go back to phrases, create refrains where there hadn’t been any. The music and the words in relation to music are different every time. Is that impure? I don’t know, but in the process it feels right.

**MD** You’ve said jokingly that the Pinsky family motto, inscribed on your coat of arms, emblazoned on your shields as you run into battle, is “All of the above!” The motto certainly applies to your artistic pursuits. There are the poems—the critically acclaimed *Selected Poems* recently out in paperback—as well as a landmark translation of Dante’s *Inferno* and several books of prose, including *The Life of David*, your inventive retelling of the legends and scriptures surrounding King David. In 2010, your libretto for Tod Machover’s opera *Death and the Powers: The*

*Robots’ Opera* premiered in Monaco before coming to Boston’s A.R.T. Next year, your adaptation of Friedrich Schiller’s *Wallenstein* will be presented by the Shakespeare Theater of Washington, DC. Do you sleep?

**RP** Maybe I am still compensating for early failure as a student, being told I was lazy, lacking in self-discipline. “No stick-to-it-ive-ness.” My effort in those days was to seem indifferent to Fs and Ds, to appear bored by warnings that my work habits would prevent me from ever holding a job. But inside, there was a kind of bewildered panic; I didn’t know why I couldn’t do well in school. Is it possible that those old shames and anxieties still propel me? Or maybe the same inborn nature that made me a poor student—easily getting bored, difficulty staying with any one thing, wandering attention, inability to prepare, whatever you call it—is more acceptable in my grown-up context? Something in me likes to try something new—sometimes, it seems, anything new!

My sister found among our mother’s relics my first-grade report card. The teacher wrote, “Robert is always polite and friendly, but he has not learned how to pay attention to the task at hand. He has taken to dreaming and talking to himself.”

*I like Robert Pinsky’s poems because they are solid and real. You feel if you punched a hole in one and stuck your head through, like a stage set, instead of some two-by-six’s propping it up and a couple of stagehands waiting around for the end, you would see all the roots and histories, old sounds and meanings of the words out front. He reminds me in a way of the artists who, tiring of the illusory nature of the surface of the canvas, tried to make their paintings also “objects” in the world, taking away the frame, the stripping, letting you see the stretcher, raw canvas’s folded corners, etc., no longer trying to hide the material of which they’re made. In this way, the paintings, or poems, might appear in the world as objects—or, if as thoughts, then also as the body experiencing those thoughts. This honesty and wholeness in Pinsky’s words creates a presence that is as welcome as it is rare.*

— Keith Althaus



... as my collaborator on anthologies, the FPP videos, many other things. I suspect that you recognize that description.

**MD** Well . . . maybe just a little. . . In your current classroom, though, you certainly aren't talking to yourself, but very generously and genuinely to your students. You've been teaching for more than forty years, and were my teacher, so I know some of your advice to young or aspiring writers. It bears repeating. So?

**RP** Choose your ancestors, and study them. Read their work the way an ambitious young cook tastes, or a serious filmmaker watches movies, or a gifted singer listens to singing. Study whatever you judge to be monuments of singing's magnificence.

Study your art with your body, as well as your mind.

Poetry is sort of preindustrial; so rooted in the human body, in particular in breath, that it lives apart from changes in technology like printed page to monitor. The page and the monitor are both industrial products; the voice is much older than that. Like many other people, I'm beginning to feel a bit elegiac or nostalgic about The Book As We Knew It. But in a way, that has more to do with prose. Those rectangular blocks of print, alive with Defoe and Freud and Melville and Marx and Austen and Carroll and Joyce and Woolf—those magic justified rectangles are a product of the Industrial Age. Poetry is older, more fluid and deeper in the human body. Its technology is verse.

Or, to look at it another way, I think the human appetite for made things is boundless: we happily play video games and string quartets, watch *Kagemusha* and Mixed Martial Arts. We recite and we twitter, we sing and we program. All of the above. And the below, too.

And of all of it, poetry may be the most durable: like music, related to an appetite that's a little like the cravings for food or sex or bodily comfort.

**MD** What if you had to choose just one poem to represent your work—the time-capsule poem, or the surviving stone tablet?

**RP** My deep conviction is: that is for other people to decide. I think you make the poems, and if you are lucky someone will want one of them, as the readers in the Favorite Poem Project want the poems they choose in the anthologies and the videos. A poem happens when someone thinks it, says it, feels it. You hope that will happen for someone, and you recognize that in some ways it will be different each time, though in other ways the same. And you don't know what some person remote from yourself in place or time might want; that's part of what I mean at the end of "Antique," when I imagine someone who at a stall buys "this picture of you"—as the poem imagines it—"for the frame."

**MD** I wonder how the long poem "An Explanation of America," which you wrote for your first daughter, would be different if you were writing it, say, to her daughter or to another of your grandchildren. Are the poems in *Gulf Music* an amendment to the explanation, to some extent?

**RP** What you say may be true of the recent poem "Creole." It is one of the tracks on the *POEMJAZZ* CD—and that track, "Creole," is now on iTunes. There's a sense in which "Creole" is a rewriting of "An Explanation of America": the particular, homemade form of ancestor worship, the blend of conflicted fatalism and conflicted patriotism. It still amazes me that I tried something as formally crazy as "Explanation"; a wacky experiment that I hope still feeds my writing. I haven't done anything as extreme in that direction since. But the approach and music of "Creole," the way it's a kind of meditative shpritz, and the poem's notion that French and German et alia are Creole languages . . . that's in the spirit, the deadpan-goofy but lead-serious, and small-town yet somehow classical, spirit. ♫

**MA** DIETZ's book of poems *Perennial Fall* won the 2007 Jane Kenyon Award for Outstanding Book of Poetry. For many years she directed the Favorite Poem Project, Robert Pinsky's undertaking during his tenure as US Poet Laureate, and coeditor of three anthologies related to the project, most recently *An Invitation to Poetry*. She teaches at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and is assistant poetry editor of the online magazine *Slate*.

## Creole

I'm tired of the gods, I'm pious about the ancestors: afloat  
In the wake widening behind me in time, the restive devisers.

My father had one job from high school till he got fired at thirty.  
The year was 1947 and his boss, planning to run for mayor,

Wanted to hire an Italian veteran, he explained, putting it  
In plain English. I was seven years old, my sister was two.

The barbarian tribes in the woods were so savage the Empire  
Had to conquer them to protect and clear its perimeter.

So into the woods Rome sent out missions of civilizing  
Governors and invaders to establish schools, courts, garrisons:

Soldiers, clerks, officials, citizens with their household slaves.  
Years or decades or entire lives were spent out in the hinterlands—

Which might be good places to retire on a government pension,  
Especially if in those work-years you had acquired a native wife.

Often I get these things wrong or at best mixed up but I do  
Feel piety toward those persistent mixed families in Gaul,

Britain, Thrace. When I die may I take my place in the wedge  
Widening and churning in the mortal ocean of years of souls.

As I get it, the Roman colonizing and mixing, the intricate Imperial  
Processes of enslaving and freeing, involved not just the inevitable

Fucking in all senses of the word, but also marriages and births  
As developers and barbers, scribes and thugs mingled and coupled

With the native people and peoples. Begetting and trading, they  
Needed to swap, blend and improvise languages—couples

Especially needed to invent French, Spanish, German: and I confess—  
Roman, barbarian—I find that Creole work more glorious than God.

The way it happened, the school sent around a notice: anybody  
Interested in becoming an *apprentice optician*, raise your hand.

It was the Great Depression, anything about a job sounded good to  
Milford Pinsky, who told me he thought it meant a kind of dentistry.

Anyway, he was bored sitting in study hall, so he raised his hand,  
And he got the job as was his destiny—full-time, once he graduated.

Joe Schiavone was the veteran who took the job, not a bad guy,  
Dr. Vineburg did get elected mayor, Joe worked for him for years.

At the bank an Episcopalian named John Smock, whose family owned  
A piece of the bank, had played sports with Milford. He gave him a small

Loan with no collateral, so he opened his own shop, grinding lenses  
And selling glasses: as his mother-in-law said, "almost a Professional."

*Optician* comes from a Greek word that has to do with seeing.  
*Banker* comes from an Italian word for a bench, where people sat,

I imagine, and made loans or change. *Pinsky* like "Tex" or "Brooklyn"  
Is a name nobody would have if they were still in that same place:

Those names all signify someone who's been away from home a while.  
*Schiavone* means "a Slav." *Milford* is a variant on the names of poets—

Milton, Herbert, Sidney—certain immigrants gave their offspring.  
*Creole* comes from a word meaning to breed or to create, in a place.

from Poetry, February 2012



# Michael Mazur's Vision of Dante's Inferno

By John Yau

I  
MICHAEL MAZUR was destined to illustrate Dante's *Inferno*, which was translated by his friend Robert Pinsky. He was the coeditor of the literary magazine at the prestigious Horace Mann School and an associate editor of the literary magazine at Amherst College, where his art teacher was the renowned book illustrator and graphic designer Leonard Baskin. In 1956–57, while a student at Amherst, Mazur spent a year abroad, living in Florence, which he characterized as “Dante’s town.” It was during this time that he first had the idea to illustrate Dante’s *Inferno*, but recognized that he was “unprepared” to do so. As Lloyd Schwartz tells us in his illuminating essay, “Michael Mazur: The Poetry of Illustration,” instead of a complete cycle, Mazur started modestly with “drawings of Dante and Geryon, from Canto XVII.”<sup>1</sup>

As anyone who knew Mazur will tell you, he followed his passions—and he had many—wherever they took him. One passion was to illustrate Dante’s vision of Hell and suffering. By 1992, when he began working on his illustrations, more than thirty years after he first read the *Inferno* in Italian, he was well prepared to undertake the challenge. He had completed many lithographs based on what he experienced while volunteering at the Howard state mental facility in Cranston, Rhode Island, during the early 1960s (Schwartz characterizes the resulting portfolio, *Images from a Locked Ward*, as Mazur’s “first artistic descent into Hell”<sup>2</sup>); he had single-handedly revived the monotype after seeing the exhibition *Edgar Degas: Monotypes* at the Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1968; he had completed a group of tonal black-and-white monotypes to illustrate Richard Howard’s translation of *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) by Charles Baudelaire in 1982; he had traveled to China to study landscape and garden traditions in 1987.

All through these years the idea of illustrating the *Inferno* never left him. In “Image and Text: A Dialogue with Robert Pinsky and Michael Mazur,” which took place at the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities (University of California at Berkeley, December 4, 1994), Mazur told the audience that in 1968 he tried to do something

connected to the *Inferno* “related to an anti-war effort . . . It was unsuccessful and [he] gave up on the effort for a while.” All of this changed when he heard the poet Robert Pinsky, his longtime friend, read the translations he had made from the *Inferno*:

I was totally unprepared for the fact that he had written two translations already; one of Canto XXVIII and one, I believe, of Canto I. It was such a remarkable surprise to me because I’d known Robert for twenty years and suddenly he was writing the translation that I’d hoped someone I knew would write so that I could illustrate it. I was very, very taken by this incredibly moving, contemporary and fast-paced, exciting translation. At that point I couldn’t wait to go up to Robert and simply say, “Look, I’m gonna do this now. I’m gonna do the illustrations. Whether we use them together or not, that’s fine. What do you think? Do you think this will go?”<sup>3</sup>

The rest, as they say, is history.



MICHAEL MAZUR, CANTO VIII: PROVINCETOWN PILGRIM MONUMENT (THE INFERNO OF DANTE), ETCHING, 25.5 BY 19.5 INCHES

II  
IN CONTRAST TO etching, which requires the artist to scratch into a metal plate, monotype involves drawing or painting on a smooth surface, such as glass or plastic. Typically, a press is used to transfer the image to a sheet of paper from the painted surface, but a rolling pin, or even one’s hands, can do the job. Monotype is more spontaneous than etching, but, unlike the many prints possible through etching, monotype produces one print, with each subsequent impression producing an inferior, ghostlier image.

I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to say that Mazur took to monotype like a hummingbird to nectar. As an artist who spent years making delicate lines in his etchings, and was committed to drawing and direct observation, monotype released something in him. More than anything else, it enabled him to move away from line and reinvent himself. In Mazur’s work, as the later paintings eloquently attest, abstraction and a haunting atmosphere superseded realism and linear precision. Works no longer had to be based on something he saw—they could be based on imagination and memory.

Mazur completed more than two hundred black-and-white monotypes with the *Inferno* in mind. His goal was to end up with thirty-four monotypes, one for each Canto. In addition, he completed “a frontispiece, a concluding yet forward looking vision of the stars after the last page of the poem, double-page endpapers, and a searing red and black wraparound cover showing a limp victim impaled on a pitchfork in silhouette against a background of flaming fireworks.”<sup>4</sup>

For Robert Pinsky, collaborating with Mazur, as the poet explains it, “helped [him] understand why an American born in 1940 into a nominally Orthodox Jewish family was translating this work that consisted mostly of physical visions of the torments that Christian souls devise for themselves.”<sup>5</sup> Although they worked separately, they communicated and met often, discussed which caption would go with what image. There was a deep rapport between Mazur and Pinsky; they wanted to make a book that, in some sense, would be larger than each of them.





*Michael and Robert. April 23, 1994*

MICHAEL MAZUR AND ROBERT PINSKY, APRIL 23, 1994 PHOTO BY ELSA DORFMAN

### III

IN CONTRAST TO the justly famous illustrations of the *Inferno* by Sandro Botticelli, Gustave Doré, and William Blake, which Mazur knew he was matching himself against, he made one major change. He never depicts Dante or Virgil, the poet's guide. Instead of allowing us to be observers, Mazur implicates us. We are not following Dante or his guide, Virgil, as they journey through Hell; we are confronting the hallucinations that haunted him. Schwartz is right when he points out that Doré's illustrations are the "most theatrical," Blake's the "most visionary," and Mazur's the "most dreamlike."

### IV

MAZUR FOCUSES ON the sufferings that Dante conjures in language. Monotype enables him to achieve both high contrast and a disturbing ghostliness, where bodies become smudges, wisps, and smoky trails, silhouettes

all but rubbed out. We are looking at bodies that have lost their fleshy substance and are transformed into apparitions. This is what I find most powerful and haunting about Mazur's illustrations—he has seamlessly merged the inherent nature of monotype with a contemporary vision of Hell, a darkly lit world of fire and ice. His vision alludes to the Holocaust and the use of napalm in the Vietnam War while being absolutely true to the spirit and letter of the *Inferno*. Only an artist of enormous sympathy and courage could have done something so bold and compelling in the name of collaboration and friendship. ▲

JOHN YAU is a poet, critic, and publisher of Black Square Editions. His most recent book of poems is *Further Adventures in Monochrome* (Copper Canyon Press, 2012). He contributed an essay to the catalogue of the exhibition Robert Motherwell: *Beside the Sea at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum* (July 20–September 30, 2012).

Midway on our life's journey, I found myself  
In dark woods, the right road lost. To tell  
About those woods is hard—so tangled and rough

And savage that thinking of it now, I feel  
The old fear stirring: death is hardly more bitter.  
And yet, to treat the good I found there as well

I'll tell what I saw, though how I came to enter  
I cannot well say, being so full of sleep  
Whatever moment it was I began to blunder

Off the true path. But when I came to stop  
Below a hill that marked one end of the valley  
That had pierced my heart with terror, I looked up

Toward the crest and saw its shoulders already  
Mantled in rays of that bright planet that shows  
The road to everyone, whatever our journey.

CANTO I, 1-15

*Translation is always a compromise. It's never complete. It's an activity in which you know you're going to fail and then can approach it almost merrily in some ways because the issue is: "How much can you get?" "How close can you come?" And you know that someday someone else is going to do it a different way and will get things that you missed.*

*Though I describe it as light-hearted, of course there's also something terrifying about attempting to contribute to, to add anything to a work that is so monumental not only in itself but in the excellent previous translations and in, probably, a ton of commentary that it has attracted. So that process of collaborating I think in some spiritual way helped me in my effort, and maybe in some ways that I won't go on about helped me understand the work. . . .*

*I think that somewhere in the word "soul" was an understanding of what the "spirit" was of a work that could survive so many hundreds of years and that could have my friend and me both thinking about it constantly. . . .*

— Robert Pinsky, discussing his translation of Dante's *Inferno*, in "Image and Text"

### NOTES

1. Trudy V. Hansen, with Essays by Barry Walker, Clifford S. Ackley, and Lloyd Schwartz, *The Prints of Michael Mazur: With a Catalogue Raisonné 1956-1999* (Hudson Hills Press, 2000), p. 110.
2. Lloyd Schwartz, "Michael Mazur, 1935-2009" in *Boston Phoenix*, August 27, 2009.
3. "Image and Text: A Dialogue with Robert Pinsky and Michael Mazur" (Doreen B. Townsend Center Occasional Papers 2, University of California, Berkeley, 1994).
4. Schwartz, p. 113.
5. "Image and Text," p. 5.



## Foreword by Tom Sleigh

WHEN I WAS PUTTING TOGETHER THIS SEQUENCE OF poems, Robert Pinsky's own poems set the bar. That's why there aren't any poets here who don't aspire to fulfill what Pinsky has so admirably fulfilled throughout his writing life. All these poets share in his restlessness with received tradition, as well as in his veneration and subtle understanding of it. They share in his concern for a music that convinces us, even before the sense of the poem can be fully understood. Perhaps most of all, they share in the human qualities that Dr. Johnson believes are necessary to write poetry:

*The poet . . . must improve and exalt by a nobler art, must animate by dramatic energy, and diversify by retrospection and anticipation; morality must teach him the exact bounds, and different shades, of vice and virtue; from policy, and the practice of life, he has to learn the discriminations of character, and the tendency of the passions, either single or combined; and physiology must supply him with illustrations and images. To put these materials to poetical use, is required an imagination capable of painting nature and realising fiction. Nor is he yet a poet till he has attained the whole extension of his language, distinguished all the delicacies of phrase, and all the colours of words, and learned to adjust their different sounds to all the varieties of metrical modulation.*

No one in our time has lived up to these qualities with more fidelity than Robert Pinsky. The poems that follow are meant as a tribute to his powers, as well as thanks: his example keeps the art honest by inspiring us, each in our own way, to live up to his achievement.



East, vast American flag Whitman sunrise; West, Jeffers' roan  
searchlight scissoring the dusk;  
between, squads platoons divisions of poets scribbling slashing  
revising correcting rejecting . . .  
What scribble are we trying to do? What have we done? What  
imagine slash when we began this?

North, geometrical Frostian ice-storms; South, Neruda-diamonds  
scorching the cordilleras.  
The voice dulls balks desires only to give itself over as it once  
seemed to to the swells surges concussions;  
not this compulsion to re-tune the unmalleable self-music even  
in bliss we're condemned to.

That way, Roethke's "washed-out interrupted raw places"; this,  
Eliot's "fragments I have shored . . ."  
Between we scribble and slash—are we trying to change the  
world by changing the words?  
Delete malice oppression tyranny poverty cruelty by our rage  
our raging obsession to amend?

Innocent scribble innocent slash who more credulous than we  
who more rendingly harmless?  
Are there songs of the soul yet unsung to calm our doubt and  
despair? Will we have to revise them?  
"O cut the sweet apple and share it . . ." Sweet scribble sweet  
slash O write the poem sweetly and share it.

## Bruce Smith

### I Walked Out with Mrs. Woolf in Winter

I walked out with Mrs. Woolf in winter between tea and dinner  
to buy a pencil. It was 1927–2011, waves of *the republican army of*  
*anonymous trampers* had come and gone: a dwarf in fawn shoes,  
police fingering Uzis at the Iraqi embassy. The eye rests on beauty,  
conveniently, but the inconvenient mind is restless with the cruel  
variances and facts that could be changed [recklessly] by a pencil.

☒

I wanted to be Galway [maybe] bloody and loved in Selma or I  
wanted to be Rich driving to Amherst to be Dickinson, ditching  
the life: anything to avoid the language and the dull [yawning]  
dukedom of desk [hollow core] and chair [swivel] that I would  
begrudgingly serve [and the verb]. Starting out: I forms desire or  
desire forms an I. Anything to avoid writing. Anything to avoid  
The World. Breathe in. Breathe in.

☒

Fear in the form of a curve: I'm afraid the Taiwanese pitcher doesn't  
understand the ironies, the nuances of Central New York where  
he's been sent [down] to work on his sinker. Can the manager  
translate the mangled downtown? The mercury in the rivers?  
Where does he go for his miso shiru, his mother tongue? Can he  
turn *counter-attack the mainland* into control of a wicked hook?



*David Rivard*

## Kid Charlemagne

On the paper's front page the crimes of gang leaders  
spoken of as newsworthy in Appalachian locker-rooms  
and Utopia Ave. workshops, but back of the Metro section  
half-forgotten Owsley Stanley 76 "the artisan of acid"  
dead in Queensland Australia, crashed—jewelry design  
learned in prison & eclipse-proof audio engineering  
the twin skills of his life beyond brews of LSD—  
his children—pining, devastated—have planted  
an oar in the sandy embankment where inexplicably  
he'd ditched his car into a tree, the piper  
paid at last for having picked the celestial locks.  
Some of us get to burn on the obituary pages  
like moonlight on the Ganges burning the bodies already  
burnt to ashes by untroubled fire in earlier sunlight—  
each man's story is the story of a rake's progress,  
each woman's song is chickenskin music & curses  
raging against the rake who cowers inside a commuter.  
You have to live once & for all as a character  
inside whatever remains of who you were—  
your zest for cherry pastries, your snake-free face,  
your prior convictions & inventions & bad  
penmanship & demands for meat at every meal.  
Each story is the story of someone in a comic strip—  
his speech balloon over-inflated he floats above  
those who think they knew him, listening:  
"His was the acid behind the Acid Tests," "He  
believed that a coming Ice Age would annihilate  
the Northern Hemisphere," "In a song he hated,  
the singer called him Kid Charlemagne,"  
"A heart attack he suffered in the 90's he ascribed  
to eating broccoli as a child, forced on him  
by his mother"—avatar of the melting horizon  
he leaves behind an ocean where an empty rowboat  
drifts slowly on the indecipherable water.

*Lloyd Schwartz*

## Dreams (Gatsby's Beguine)

Strange strange as it seems  
You're in my dreams  
Still in my dreams

Day day turns to night  
And every night  
You fill my dreams

How I toss and turn  
Will I ever learn  
Does my love deserve all this pain

My heart's a top  
When will it stop  
Do you/don't you will you/won't you  
Drive me insane

Strange strange as it seems  
You're in my dreams  
You're still in my dreams

Late late every night  
I put out the light  
So I can dream



*James McMichael*

*from Of Paul*

When she wasn't a  
baby anymore,  
her father told her  
she must have had a halo around her whole body,  
they loved her so much. (He'd said she

"must" have had it.  
That meant the nimbus they were sure of wasn't  
formed to be seen.)

More than once  
she'd watched clouds  
stack so over a sweep of country  
that,  
scape-like too,

they had the look of matter  
deep with its own coordinates and darks.  
To no horizon,  
the clouds had been stretched

into themselves from  
sky.  
Each form

(too late at it already)

giving  
place right away,

the passings showed how  
anything she sees  
screens over what  
supplies it

and then takes it back.  
When she was  
ten one day at the hospital,

her mother  
looked at her and struggled to  
ask about school.

Coffined was how she saw her next.  
On that day,  
of just her mother and her,  
she herself was the one who could see  
to walk across the room and

do that  
when her father asked  
did she

want to touch her mother.  
She should have wanted to.  
Maybe it was good to have done.  
She touched the right

cheek a little  
and thought her mother had for  
days now been cloud.  
Something she couldn't really  
know about her

she knew:

her mother wasn't in heaven.  
After that,

there'd been the years her father wasn't  
sick yet.

She doesn't know who's living now  
inside the third-floor windows that were his.  
They're people she doesn't look for when she stands out front,

she might be seen

down on the street  
outside  
by someone not her father.  
(If she herself weren't

visible anymore,  
she couldn't see he's not here.)

In the measure that she trusts  
all persons are  
(as Paul is) held "in Christ,"



a person's  
loved improbability for someone  
else brings  
weeping when it's lost,  
but also

isn't wept for

since it's warranted as saved.  
Against death's having  
Hagar's son outright,

and Sarah's,  
Jesus said  
"Before  
Abraham was,  
I am,"

for the sons and daughters inside  
Jesus alive,

this promised fastness of a  
space-not-timed.  
Unexposed  
"in Christ" there,  
contained,

the mourned are  
yet in that life assented to  
by any for whom

nothing's  
outside Christ,

not the unborn,  
not any person's  
death, even, which if  
outside Christ  
would mean a life we're

ditched by too soon.  
Death is the last thing given.  
For each one born it perfects

timelessly  
a Now that lasts.  
Paul wants us to know the last thing  
he was given was the

Christ in him  
whom he himself was in.  
It was for himself  
first he prayed to  
"Let this mind be in you which was

also in  
Christ Jesus,  
who thought it not plunder to be  
equal with God,  
but made himself of  
no reputation."  
Only when he'd made his God-form

mortal for a while  
and died  
could Jesus be reputed  
always to live.  
Risen from the dead, Jesus

preached again.  
Five hundred people heard him.  
It was said of Jesus that that was how it was.  
If Jesus spoke from his  
body again after he died,

it couldn't be that it was only  
said that he did.  
The Resurrection either  
was or was not.  
Only if it was not can it be  
fabled as true.

*Alan Shapiro*

## The Not Lord

"And him who escapes  
from the sword of Hazael  
shall Jehu slay; and him  
who escapes from the  
sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay."

The tribes, the states,  
the multitudes of nations,  
peoples to be slaughtered,  
more numberless than all  
the houseflies ever  
to have died, the prophet's  
prophecies banging  
in the name of,  
against a too clear  
pane of: he who is  
who he is, who  
made the wind shatter  
the rock face into rubble  
but was not the wind,  
who made the earth  
shake open but was not  
the earth, and not  
the fire shaken  
from the earth that,  
after the fire, disintegrated  
into vapor into air,  
into the airy nowhere  
of a quantum silence  
inside the spectral  
vagaries within  
a vacuum of a  
bubble of the not lord  
soundlessly exploding  
in the prophet's mouth  
on the prophet's tongue,  
shaping the sounds of  
what would happen soon.



# PO

*Maggie Dietz*

## Still Falling

Crisp and brittle, the leaves the branches,  
Broken and blanched the bones, the ashes.  
Ashes coat the ghost-gray branches.

Tusks of steel, the busted girders,  
Skulls of rooms; the sun's ghost lingers  
Over skewed pipes and crusts of windows

Scattered among the shattered people.  
Later the moon, a flake of opal,  
Oversees the writhing rubble:

Fingers of smoke sift and thicken.  
Ashen figures swarm the smitten  
Grave. They light and listen—

Even the living are ghosts, are history.  
All bewilderment, no mystery.  
Fuel smolders in the blistering

Smear of heat, the voices calling.  
Somehow it's the dark unveiling  
The ruin of this still fresh, still falling.

*Gail Mazur*

## At Dusk in the Yard

At dusk, in the yard of people—people you never knew—  
a night blooming cereus was about to open,

and eleven of us gathered to observe the opening.  
In a desert, so ordinary no one would remark on it,

yet in Medford this couple  
moves dozens of cacti and exotic orchids out of their house  
each spring then back in before the first frost,

recognizing signs we didn't know—  
(all year it had looked a dry stick)

that one morning the shrivelly pod begins its move  
toward a single night's attenuated blossoming—

and they called people to share their night watch,

night so hot, so steamy,  
we all took turns going out to the yard to check  
and report back in—

I say *we* though I felt *I*, and *they*—

to stream back in,  
the air being cooler, the beer cold, and the table laden.

# E



# RY

Finally, alone on the front steps I saw the spiky white petals  
lifting slowly from their homely bud, so slowly

I might have been imagining a flowering,  
dreamy as time-lapse photography. Minute to minute,  
the changes infinitesimal.

Nocturnal quiet, great starry sky, and through the lit windows,  
tinkling of glasses, laughter.  
Had I been thirsty, no drink would quench my thirst.

At midnight, the luscious bud half-open, its interior glowing,  
I left for home.

Had I waited until morning, I'd have seen the golden starburst's  
withered casing,  
pale ghostly vessel of the night's spectacular.

Nocturnal queen, cactus flower, or like a water lily, or—  
I can't convey to you its visceral, ethereal glory.

Morning: a ghostly husk, wizened remainder of a night's story.

One night! One night! To believe *that* living  
thing will return again, renewed again, next year.

# T

*Peter Campion*

## Los Angeles River

The concrete channel for flood control  
has nothing to control today  
but litter. Is it even wet

down there? Some little puddles  
shimmer around the punk rock weeds.  
Or else the shimmer's heat mirage.

This city deals in heat mirage.  
Dreams of arrival as a star  
streaming through canyon parties. Dreams

of pink Camaro flames released  
to flare from El Centro checkpoint.  
Right here could be where dreams end up:

film scattered on a concrete river.  
Some animal must make a home  
inside those weeds, some creature soul

(probably rabid) must subsist there  
scavenging claw to fang: some urge  
constant as blood or breath must circle

up from the faintest synapse fire  
to begin again again  
from way down make it hurt abandon.



## Michael Collier

### Brendan's Hair

And we spent a long time hovering above the sky,  
crying on its great canvas surface, tears collecting  
in low spots, sagging the fabric through which  
the sun usually poured. That's why we went back inside

and took up the brooms to push off the water and drain  
the burden our sadness made, that's why we walked up  
the aisle holding hands, straight to his white coffin—  
a gift from the queen of cold and ice—and his white suit,

the touch of snow on the bruised forehead—icing  
from the vault of death—and the white blanket  
folded under his gleaming hands, and why we didn't linger  
except to register the scalp, albino pink,

and hair in its last furrows but wrongly parted,  
which is what my son wanted to know from that instant  
of seeing his friend in the elaborate bed, he wanted to know:  
"Why did they do that to Brendan's hair?"

## David Wojahn

### Elegy: Robot Folding Laundry

*Examine Pile:* a stereo camera mounted in the robot's head

Looks for a central point of a towel lying in a pile.

The robot grabs the center with one arm. *Detect Corners:* the robot

Lifts, shakes & rotates the towel, using an algorithm

To visually locate & grasp the two adjacent corners.

*Untwist:* the robot pulls the towel several times.

If the robot sees the towel is twisted, it adjusts its tempo,

Rotating its grip until the towel's without twists. It heads

To the table. *Lay Flat:* it grasps the towel's corners

With the short side up, adjusting its grip, & pulls

The towel across the table's edge, again using an algorithm

To smooth the towel flat. *Re-examine & Fold:* the robot's

Cameras estimate the towel's size & position. The robot

Now may fold the towel in half by aligning at least two times

The top & bottom corners. *Fold Again:* employing another algorithm

The robot then changes grips & repeats the flattening. The head's

Cameras pan the table. The robot folds the towel in quarters. *Stack:*

The towel is placed neatly on a stack of towels. The robot angles

Back to the unfolded pile. *Repeat:* rotate the towel, grasp the corner

Once again, etc. How my mother wallowed in her sorrow. But

Folding laundry was ritual joy. Always Sunday, always the piles

Tabletop high. Always highballs, always *Bonanza*, her head

Nimbused in pink curlers, her movements sudden & arrhythmic

& the mentholed fog of chain-smoked L&Ms. Always it's 7 o'clock

& already she's half-snookered, flipping channels to *Sixty Minutes*

*Examine Pile:* two long drags, one short swig, Airedale in the corner

Chasing rabbits in dream. *Detect Corners:* she is heading

Kitchenward for gin; the m.s. makes her walk robotic;

Her scowl at the socks without mates. *Untwist:* she's got her rhythm

Now, towers of dungarees, high as the parapets of Troy, stacks

Of negligee & boxers. *Lay Flat:* cinders wafting down on piles

Of Madras, paisley shortsleeves. *Re-examine & Fold:* it's time

For one last short one, new ice clinking its whispered rhythm

As she navigates a gingham skyline. *Fold Again:* airy as popcorn,

The hankies teeter. *Stack:* linens for their double beds, headscarves,

Jet-black slips. *Repeat, Repeat:* screensaver photo, coalescing as I reboot.

Head cocked, a melancholy vamp for the camera, L&M angled

& burnt to the filter. She stands out of time. Memory's algorithms:

Brazen arrow. But always she stares me down, laundry on the concrete in a heap.



*Sarah Rose Nordgren*

## Still Birth

The wall should be strong enough to break the force upon it. Wind tunnels right up the street from the sea, battering the glass, forcing itself through wooden slats, and the pages of the book flutter crazily. Content usually roots story to ground, but I sense it shivering around you when you turn half-awake in bed, disturbed. You woke from the story I was telling like the second half of the book fell into the water when the binding gave, replaced with the sound of rushing. The introduction was too long, but the invisible boy had already traveled for a year and a day, had tamed the wolf in the lightless forest, fought the man with the giant, red face, but he had not yet bought the globe that (he would discover) could take him anywhere, not yet come upon the broken eggs with pennies in them. Though you know the story, I mean to remind you that he will, eventually, return. Not in body, no, but every time I tell it he becomes more real. This is one of the stories we live in against nature—I was trying to tell you over the wind. If you learn anything from living in this house, it will be how to survive a variety of interruptions.

*Philip Schultz*

## The Teacher

She sat there quietly,  
across the kitchen table,  
playing solitaire, each  
sighing breath rising and falling,  
the green shine of her eyes  
turning opaque, each descent  
of her shoulders lowering me,  
her left shoe tapping a tune  
I never recognized. Not once  
did I interrupt, ask for something  
the way father always did.  
I sat across the snowy world,  
slowly mastering the art of  
disappearing into someone else.

*Joshua Weiner*

## The Transparent Law

Who dropped the sun  
Caged the kestrel yesterday  
Who made the mountjac run  
Here & far away—

Who left the tap on full  
Opening doors to strangers  
Who's moving & who's still  
Minding creatures—

Who picked up the yoke  
And yoked it to the shoulder  
Who eggs-on the young—  
And when they're older

Who japes the sagging jaw  
Who opens closed spaces  
Who turns open space  
Into places—

And who calls up those dead  
To seat them at the table  
After the harm they did  
Who then dissembled—

Monuments' meanings drift  
Music loses timbre  
When speech can't make fast  
What we remember.



Rosanna Warren

## Montpellier

Each red roof tile with a rim of shadow under its fingernail,  
chimney pots hung over and gaga, courtyards dusky, and the swish of  
traffic surf  
lifting to our sixth floor windows—Montpellier,  
you are the Queen of Summer, the patroness  
of gold neck chains, cut crystal perfume vials, and exotic tea.

Necklines plunge in your honor, motor scooters chortle and bleat.  
The Mediterranean drapes its cobalt shawl along your horizon.  
City of heresies, you knocked down every church, and Louis XIV  
charges at you day and night on his bronze warhorse outside the Arc de  
Triomphe  
to make sure you stay French. You have your saint,

the pilgrim, St. Roch. He gave his family's fortune away,  
took to the roads to follow the plague, healing the sick.  
He died, unknown, in prison. Who's to say  
that leathery vagrant begging at the corner isn't a version of Roch?  
Where the sun smashes down on an empty construction site

a four-year-old boy kicks a rock, immensely alone.  
The swifts ceaselessly swoop, curvet, and veer in ellipses,  
their legs are atrophied, they never land except to skim  
at night on their bellies under the eaves. And the calendar pages  
as ceaselessly turn. A shadow comes to nest under each one.

David Ferry

## One Two Three Four Five

*anger*

Anger is what I don't know what to do with.  
I know it was anger was the trouble that other time.  
I don't know where the anger came from, that time,  
Or where it was I was going on anger's back  
On a mission to somewhere to get me through the  
danger.

*whatever*

Whatever it is I think I probably know.  
However whatever it is I keep from knowing.  
No, it is not whatever I think I know.  
Maybe I'll never know whatever it is.  
Some day it has to be figured out. Whatever.

*somebody*

Somebody's got to tell me the truth some day.  
And if somebody doesn't tell me the truth I'll tell it.  
On my block there was somebody knew the truth, I  
think.  
Or so I thought. Anyway somebody knew  
That trying to tell the truth is looking for somebody.

*isn't*

If it isn't anywhere I guess it isn't.  
But if it isn't why do I think it is?  
I guess there really isn't any way  
For me to find out what is or isn't there  
In the black night where it either was or wasn't.

*where*

Where was it I was looking in the past?  
It isn't where I've looked, that's no surprise.  
I don't know what or where it is or was.  
But maybe it isn't so much the where but the why.  
Or maybe I haven't found it because beware.



## Joachim du Bellay translated by Seamus Heaney

from *Antiquités de Rome*

### Du Bellay in Rome

You who arrive to look for Rome in Rome  
And can in Rome no Rome you know discover:  
These ancient palaces and arches ivied over  
And ancient walls are Rome, now Rome's a name.

Here see Rome's overbearing overcome—  
Rome, who brought the world beneath her power  
And held sway, robbed of sway: see and consider  
Rome the prey of all-consuming time.

And yet this Rome is Rome's one monument.  
Rome alone could conquer Rome. And the one element  
Of constancy in Rome is the ongoing

Seaward rush of Tiber. O world of flux  
Where time destroys what's steady as the rocks  
And what resists time is what's ever flowing.

**Tom Sleight's** many books of poems include *Army Cats*, published last year by Graywolf Press, and *Space Walk*, winner of the 2008 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. He has also received the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, a fellowship from the American Academy in Berlin, the John Updike Award and an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an Individual Writer's Award from the Lila Wallace Fund, and grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. He teaches in the MFA program at Hunter College and lives in Brooklyn.



**Peter Campion** is the author of two books of poems, *Other People* (2005) and *The Lions* (2009), both from the University of Chicago Press. He's the recipient of the Larry Lewis Reading Prize, the Rome Prize, and the Guggenheim Fellowship. He teaches in the MFA program at the University of Minnesota.

**Michael Collier's** most recent book of poems is *An Individual History* (W. W. Norton, 2012). A former Fellow at FAWC (1979–80), he is the director of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and teaches at the University of Maryland.

**Maggie Dietz's** book of poems *Perennial Fall* won the 2007 Jane Kenyon Award for Outstanding Book of Poetry. For many years she directed the Favorite Poem Project, Robert Pinsky's undertaking during his tenure as US Poet Laureate, and is coeditor of three anthologies related to the project, most recently *An Invitation to Poetry*. She teaches at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and is assistant poetry editor of the online magazine *Slate*.

**David Ferry** is an acclaimed poet and translator, known for his translations of some of the world's major works of poetry. Currently, he is the emeritus Sophie Chantal Hart professor of English at Wellesley College, and a Distinguished Visiting Scholar at Suffolk University. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize; the Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Poetry Prize, Library of Congress; and the Poetry Foundation's 2011 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize for lifetime achievement. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Seamus Heaney** is an Irish poet, playwright, translator, lecturer, and recipient of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature. Heaney has also received the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize (1968), the E. M. Forster Award (1975), the Golden Wreath of Poetry (2001), T. S. Eliot Prize (2006), and two Whitbread Prizes (1996 and 1999). He was both the Harvard and the Oxford Professor of Poetry and was made a Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1996.

**Gail Mazur** is the author of six books of poems, including 2011's *Figures in a Landscape*. *Zeppo's First Wife: New and Selected Poems* in 2006 won the Massachusetts Book Award in Poetry and was finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. She is Distinguished Writer-in-Residence in the Emerson College MFA program. Mazur lives in Cambridge and Provincetown, where she is a longtime member of FAWC's Writing Committee.

**James McMichael's** two most recent books are *The World at Large: New and Selected Poems, 1971–1996*, and *Capacity*.

**Sarah Rose Nordgren's** poems have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Pleiades*, *The Literary Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Verse Daily*, and the *Best New Poets 2011* anthology. She is the recipient of two poetry Fellowships from the Fine Arts Work



in Provincetown, where she was a second-year Fellow in 2011–12, Louis Untermeyer Tuition Scholarship from the Bread Loaf Writers Conference. She grew up in Durham, North Carolina.

**Walter Riva** is the author of five books, including *Otherwise Elsewhere*, *Sugarbush*, and *Wise Poison*, winner of the James Laughlin Award. Among his awards are fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He teaches in the University of New Hampshire MFA program.

**Philip Schultz's** memoir, *My Dyslexia*, was published in 2011 by W. W. Norton. His poetry collection, *Failure*, won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize. He founded and directs the Writers Studio, a private school for fiction and poetry writing based in Manhattan, with branches in Tucson, San Francisco, Amsterdam, Paris, and online.

**Lloyd Schwartz** teaches in the MFA program at the University of Massachusetts Boston and reviews classical music for *The Boston Phoenix* and NPR's *Fresh Air*. His most recent book of poems is *Cairo Traffic* (University of Chicago), and he edited Elizabeth Bishop's *Poems, Prose, and Letters* (Library of America) and the centennial edition of Bishop's *Prose* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). He was awarded the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Criticism.

**Alan Shapiro**, a professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has published eleven books of poetry, most recently, *Night of the Republic* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012). He has received numerous awards and honors, including the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award and a Los Angeles Times Book Prize in poetry, and was a finalist in poetry and nonfiction for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

**Bruce Smith** is the author of six books of poems: *The Common Wages*, *Silver and Information*, *Mercy Seat*, *The Other Lover*, which was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize; *Songs for Two Voices*; and most recently *Devotions* (University of Chicago, 2011), also a finalist for the National Book Award and listed as a *Publishers Weekly* book of the year.

**Rosanna Warren** teaches English and Comparative Literature at Boston University. Her most recent book of poems is *Ghost in a Red Hat* (W. W. Norton, 2011). Her awards include honors from the Lila Wallace Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Academy of American Poets.

**Joshua Weiner** is the author of *The World's Room* and *From the Book of Giants*, and the editor of *At the Barriers: On the Poetry of Thom Gunn* (all from University of Chicago Press). He teaches at the University of Maryland and lives in Washington, DC.

**C. K. Williams** has won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award, among others. A book of poems, *Writers Writing Dying*, will be published in the autumn of 2012, as well as a book of essays, *In Time*. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Princeton University.

**David Wojahn's** eighth collection of poetry, *World Tree*, was published in 2011 by the University of Pittsburgh Press. He teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University and in the MFA in Writing Program of the Vermont College of Fine Arts.



Mary Maxwell

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# ART WORLD DETAILS

journal excerpts 1952–92

By B. H. Friedman



B. H. FRIEDMAN AND JACKSON POLLOCK AT EDDIE CONDON'S JAZZ CLUB, MAY 14, 1956, THREE MONTHS BEFORE POLLOCK'S DEATH

**F**ROM THE 1950s until his death last year, the writer B. H. Friedman spent almost equal time in New York, Provincetown, and East Hampton. During this half century he published six novels, three volumes of stories, the first biographies of Jackson Pollock and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, as well as numerous art monographs and seven plays, all but two presented off-Broadway or in the Hamptons. In 2006 Provincetown Arts Press published Friedman's memoir of Timothy Leary, *Tripping*, and in 2009 we published Friedman's last novel, *My Case Rests*, which was as tightly constructed, carefully layered, and story-driven as Friedman's other highly regarded fiction.

For forty years, he also kept a journal, documenting his active conversations, not only with artists but also with dealers, critics, curators, collectors, and the overlapping worlds of writers, jazz musicians, and others on the scene.

His friends called him Bob, or, just as often, "B.H.," out of playful recognition of his aristocratic/bohemian style, so well-suited to the art world circles he traveled in. I met him in 1970 when he signed up for season-long lessons with me at the Provincetown Tennis Club, where my summer job was teaching tennis. Typically, B.H. wanted us to play for money, but he needed a huge handicap: sometimes I spotted him five games to love and at love-forty in the sixth game of the first set. He had to win one point to win the set. Occasionally, I did lose, and he got a free lesson.

And, yes, our tennis matches did indeed make the pages of the journal, along with a wealth of anecdotes that illuminate not only B.H.'s wit and keen insights into human nature but also the lives of artists, friends, and colleagues during turbulent times in American history. His *Journals*, which will someday be published in their eight-hundred-page entirety, are especially timely now because of their keen focus on Robert Motherwell and the artists who were his colleagues at Long Point Gallery, both the subject of exhibitions this summer at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. —CB



To Jackson Pollock: "I saw a movie you'd like—*Rebel Without a Cause*. The story's heavily psychiatric, but Dean's performance is terrific."

Pollock: "I'm not involved with movies."

"You'd like this. It's as good as *The Wild One*."

Pollock: "What do they know about being wild? I'm wild. There's wildness in me. There's wildness in my hands."

## 25 JANUARY 56

Robert Rauschenberg: "The aura of Pollock got ahead of him."

## 6 FEBRUARY 56

Saul Steinberg at Betty and Bob Motherwell's: "I don't read palms. Anyone can read palms. I read feet. Palms tell you about the future. Feet tell you about the past. I don't care about tomorrow. I care about yesterday."

## 27 JULY 56

Abby and I at Jackson's for the weekend of my thirtieth birthday. Ruth Kligman there. Lee [Krasner Pollock] in Europe. Jackson drunk almost continuously.

## 13 AUGUST 56

Just learned that Jackson died in a car crash Saturday night. Ruth badly hurt. Friend of hers also died. Terrible loss. But I can't help thinking that Abby and I might have been killed two weekends earlier under similar circumstances.

## 16 AUGUST 56

Yesterday at Jackson's funeral I cried for the first time in many years. Men shouldn't be taught not to cry—it helps.

## 17 JANUARY 57

Sam Hunter: "Greenberg says Smith is the best sculptor of his time."

Bob Motherwell: "Best is too general. He's the best David Smith of his time."

## 20 APRIL 57

Franz Kline to Doug Watson [an aeronautical engineer]: "The artist and the engineer are both involved with invention. The engineer invents something to do something. The artist invents something to do nothing—because he has nothing to do."

Kline turns to me: "For forty-seven years I gave them their reality and they didn't understand it. Now I give them my reality and they think they understand it."

Motherwell: "You get something and you lose something with a child. The important thing is to remember that what you get and what you lose are different things. They don't balance out, because they're not the same."

## 11 JULY 57 (EAST HAMPTON)

A few months ago, Bob Motherwell commented that naming our son Jackson after Pollock might be a curse, but of course everyone here appreciates the name. Yesterday, as I was leaving the Pollock house

I picked up a hitchhiker who turned out to be the driver of the car behind Pollock's when he was killed. He said casually, "I was doing sixty-five, so he must have been doing seventy."

## 31 AUGUST 57

East Hampton is becoming an insane asylum. One becomes involved with a crowd that is both too inbred and too large—exactly what one tries to escape from in the city. I'm becoming disenchanted. There are less crowded beaches.

## 9 JANUARY 58

The sadness last night of going through Bob Motherwell's library, being offered books for fifty cents apiece that he's spent a lifetime collecting—the record of his life, of his involvements with philosophy, French literature, Surrealism, etc. I understand his need to unload, his desire to travel light, but for him it's a fantasy. Some of us will always travel heavy, will always accumulate possessions, will seek or invent complications if there are none.

His nostalgia for Surrealism at dinner was moving too: the yearning for intellectual brilliance and exchange combined with the ability to see innocently, the yearning for a visit to a bookshop with Magritte. Yet his having almost forgotten the dictatorial aspects of the Surrealist world, the cruelty, the insensitivity, the nightmare of life-as-a-game when this principle is applied to human relations.

Andre Emmerich at the Reis's: "The excitement of being an art dealer is always in the find, never in the sale."

Me: "Never?"

Mark Rothko: (interrupting) "These are mysteries I don't understand."

Emmerich: "But your creative activities make these mysteries possible."

Me: "Rothko understands these mysteries as well as any of us." Exit Rothko. Then to Emmerich: "Why are you so polite?"

Emmerich: "It's my business to be polite."

## 8 AUGUST 58

Barney [Newman] said for the past hour or so on the phone: "Everything about this 103<sup>rd</sup> Street apartment is perfect, except the location. It's a little frightening to go out at night. The trouble is thugs never ask what you do, or I'd tell them that I live by my wits, too. They see a guy who's dressed well and they assume he's rich. If they rob you or hurt you or kill you it's always a case of mistaken identity."

## 17 JANUARY 59

Sitting opposite two of Pollock's paintings, I was hit again by the music and dance in them, then asked Lee and Barney if Jackson had ever played a musical instrument. As usual, Barney did most of the talking. He spoke at length about Jackson saying many times that he would rather have been a musician than a painter. Then Barney described Jackson's harmonica playing: first, at home when he was outshone by his brother, Sande McCoy, later with Thomas Hart Benton. I asked Jackson several times to play the harmonica, but he never would because it was much later, when he was rebelling

against Benton and hated everything Benton stood for. I heard Jackson play the piano though. At Ossorio's, he sat down at the piano and some lady said he would break it. He remained there playing for half an hour. He was interested in clusters of sounds, noises—something like John Cage—or Morty Feldman, whose work he respected a lot. Jackson hit the keys with his fists, the palms of his hands, his elbows, his forearms. I'll never forget it. I'm glad that lady got him started by telling him to stop.

## 12 MARCH 59

A piece of driftwood on the beach is not kitsch. Kitsch is never an accident. Make a lamp base or a sculpture out of it, and it becomes kitsch.

Anecdote about Hans Hofmann seeing Reinhardt with his child on the street a few years ago, patting the child on the head and saying, "What a nice boy." Then recently Reinhardt, out with his daughter Anna, actually his only child, met Hofmann who patted the child on the head and said, "What a nice girl, but I thought you had a boy."

## 16 MAY 59

Helen [Frankenthaler] calling her psychiatrist about whether or not to fire her butler.

## 18 JULY 59 (EAST HAMPTON)

Jack Kerouac, arriving at Lee's surrounded by an entourage: "I thought this was an open party."

Lee: "It's not that open."

## 7 JULY 60

Me: "Do you drink when you paint?"

Barney: "I drink, but I don't get drunk. I just drink enough to get closer to the metaphysical terror."

## 10 FEBRUARY 63

Bob Motherwell describes an encounter with de Kooning:

DeK: "We should be friends. You've always been a little edgy with me."

Bob to me: "This is the most fashionable, the most handsome painter in America."

Bob reaches for a cigarette, then continues his account of what de Kooning said: "You've always been aloof. I used to watch you. You had the best clothes of any painter. What is the problem between us?"

Bob: "You frighten me."

Bob to me again: "My choice is between being smothered by de Kooning, becoming 'one of the boys,' and being his enemy."

There is something else that Bob didn't mention (except for his reference to clothes): de Kooning's attitude toward wealth. De Kooning has always represented himself as the professional craftsman, intolerant of the amateur, who, for him, is synonymous with wealth, no matter how serious and productive. Harold Rosenberg's intellectual love affair with de Kooning is based upon his symbolic role as "worker." De Kooning represents the side of the "class struggle" with which Rosenberg has identified. Motherwell represents "the enemy." In this melodrama of abstractions, Rosenberg doesn't look at paintings, he looks at politics.



24 JULY 64

Helen: "I'm the best woman painter in America and what am I doing? Running two houses here [Provincetown] and one in New York, entertaining, taking care of children, doing everything but paint."

How guilty Helen feels when she's not working. And how restless when she has time to work. She lives to an unusual degree among dichotomies: male-female, wealth-art, "society"-bohemia, work-play.

31 AUGUST 64

Motherwell: "An artist has no worse enemies than his bad works."

Mailer referring to me all night as a warlock, presumably because [his wife] Beverly couldn't light her brandy with me watching. A funny habit of his, wanting to get a bead on everybody right away, whether accurate or not. (I can't remember what birds he compared Henry Geldzahler and Bryan Robertson to.) Also, like a somewhat punchy fighter, the way he stalks people. For him social life seems to be a sort of free-association target practice, a mixture of benign entertainment and childish aggression, playfulness and competitiveness. Motherwell caught the habit: he later referred to Mailer as "the Jewish Brendan Behan."

5 NOVEMBER 64

The Whitney's Edward Hopper retrospective: Hopper is an artist whose work I liked, whose point of view I've been able to identify with: the poignant loneliness, the deep sense of isolation. Now I'm afraid he is basically an *illustrator of loneliness*. Bonnard is poignant, too, but his is the poignancy of love, of the evanescence of life, women, flowers. He is glad to have these things, sad that they pass so quickly. Hopper, I would guess, has never felt great enough joy to evoke intense sadness at its passing.

10 JANUARY 65

When Lee and Jackson moved to East Hampton, Bob Motherwell was already there considering buying a piece of property across the road. One night, at their place, after many drinks, he said, "I'm going to be the best best-known artist in America." Lee said, "I'm lucky to live opposite the best-known artist in America and be married to the best."

27 MARCH 65

Al Held had been explaining the subtlety of Motherwell's painting. Frank O'Hara replied, "You give us credit for being able to read black and white, for being able to see the difference between them, but when it's ochre and umber—what a lovely phrase 'ochre and umber'—you think we can't see the difference. It's not that hard."

17 APRIL 65

Larry Rivers: "It's hot in here."  
Morton Feldman: "You're a painter—break a window."

13 OCTOBER 65

Howard Kanovitz described a night at the Cedar Tavern in the early fifties. Pollock, de Kooning, Kline, and others were there. Howie was standing

near the entrance when two tourists came in. They looked around quickly and one said to the other: "This is the place where the painters are supposed to come, but there's no one here tonight."

3 MARCH 66

Lee Krasner: "Motherwell said somewhere—I don't remember where, he's all over the place—that after a time he stopped painting with just his hand and wrists and began using his arm. He discovered his arm! He moved up from the wrist to the shoulder. But it still hadn't occurred to him that you can paint with your whole body—that's what American painting is all about."

18 JUNE 66

One of the dates by which I measure my life is my first summer on the Cape, 1963, the year I left business, the year of my rebirth.

28 JUNE 66

Most so-called dialogue involves one person waiting impatiently for another to stop speaking so he can say what he was going to say before the other began.

20 JULY 66

Fritz Bultman reminiscing about Hofmann's use of the English language: "He once said to a model, 'I'd like to screw you on the floor.' He meant that her pose was so beautiful he wanted to fix her to the floor, ready for the next time he painted. When an author sent him a book, he wrote that he was anxious to *overlook* it."

3 AUGUST 66

Motherwell, speaking of David Smith's will: "There are no clauses. The people are the clauses. Each executor was chosen to play a specific role: Greenberg in relation to the art world, myself in relation to his daughters who are the same age as mine."

22 JANUARY 68

Bob Motherwell to Frank Lloyd after Bob's MoMA show [i.e., at a time when Bob thought he might do better than Lloyd's Marlborough Gallery]: "Do you think we need a contract? Can't we just have a gentleman's agreement?"

Lloyd: "Impossible."

Motherwell: "Why?"

Lloyd: "Because I'm no gentleman."

Lee said that now Bob was calling the gallery daily to find out what's delaying the contract.

21 APRIL 69

Barney Newman to Tom Hess: "A heart attack is like instant psychoanalysis."

9 OCTOBER 69

I'm afraid that before I finish my Pollock biography [*Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*] something will happen to destroy my relationship with Lee.

20 AUGUST 72

Elise [Asher] refers to a brief visit by the Gustons:

"Philip's gained a lot of weight and Musa looked quite ravaged but, you know, he must take a bite out of her each day at lunch."

7 DECEMBER 72

Someone should photograph the lines of people at MoMA looking at Diane Arbus's photographs. They are yet another Rorschach.

24 OCTOBER 74

Reuben Nakian (age 77): "I don't know why but most of my friends have chosen to die."

3 SEPTEMBER 76

I tend to rationalize my gradual loss of memory as some sort of positive, selective process in which I discard what is unimportant. But as I tell Roger Skillings, sometimes I can't even remember my phone number. He replies, "I can't remember my name. I don't know how to sign what I have written. I don't know who wrote it."

4 DECEMBER 76

Renate Motherwell was my dinner partner. She spoke about the way she spoils Bob. Every morning at eleven she brings him breakfast in bed with a rose on his tray. "I live for his saying hi in that darling way of his."

2 JANUARY 77

On the phone I mention to Elise that Abby and I are going to Egypt.

Elise asks: "Does that mean you will be living the rest of your life in profile?"

"No, but I'll probably continue in low relief."

26 OCTOBER 77

There is arrogance and vanity in the Egyptian assumption that life can be deified in monuments, yet no more than in my own desire to preserve life in words.

2 JULY 79

Barbara Wasserman [Norman Mailer's sister] called to say Norman would be coming up, inviting us to cocktails at five this evening. We walked down to the apartment Barbara and Al had rented. Mailer wasn't there yet—just the Wassermans' tennis crowd, Peter Manso, Al Jaffee, Eddie Bonetti, Danny Banko.

Chris Busa said, "I knew he'd be late. He always has to do something like that, although one time my father threw a party for him after he gave a lecture at the University of Minnesota and he came early. But that's what I mean, too."

When Mailer arrived a few minutes later, Chris and I were among the first to greet him. Chris swung out, "You've gained a lot of weight."

Norman patted his stomach, bulging from a work shirt left open almost down to his belt. "The curse of the Jewish son," he said, his blue eyes twinkling. He was obviously in a benign mood. "You do your work and you get fed."

I asked him if he ate during work.

"Never."





# BLEED

By John Buffalo Mailer

## PART 1

Alex

Provincetown, Massachusetts  
July 1, 1995

**I'M DRIVING HOME** on Route 6 when it occurs to me a couple of friends from Brooklyn are coming to visit today, Gonzo and Mike. The new techno version of *Total Eclipse of the Heart* just ended on the radio and the DJ informs me the Fourth of July is in three days. Heat beats down on my head through the sunroof as sand dunes pass by on my right giving me the illusion I'm in the Sahara. Provincetown is good like that—it gives you many illusions.

I pull up to my parents' place, a big shingle-style house in the East End, very Cape Cod. Gonzo's car is parked outside, a true Brooklyn car: Black Toyota Corolla, '93. Shiny silver hubcaps put on by Gonzo himself. To be honest, I'm a little uneasy about these guys coming to visit me here. Not so much because my parents don't like them (although they don't), it's more that I have no idea what kind of trouble I am bringing upon myself by making these two worlds, P-town and Brooklyn, collide in the madness that is sure to take place this weekend.

I walk around the side of our house to the beach and see Gonzo and Mike sitting in their bathing suits drinking bottles of Bud.

"What the hell are you two vagrants doing on my property?" I shout.

"Al! Finally! Three hours waiting for your silly ass to show up. Where the fuck you been?"

That's Gonzo. He's short, and everything that goes along with it.

"I been at work, you stupid bastard. Who told your dumb ass to show up before I got home?" I work at a nice Italian restaurant, *Ciro's*, right in the heart of Provincetown. But I'm just a busboy.

We laugh because it's been a long time since we've seen each other, and now we're on the beach with beer and sun, and life feels good. I grew up in Brooklyn until I was sixteen, spending summers here on the Cape. But after Rebecca's funeral, my parents kind of retired from life and we moved up here full time. Now I'm eighteen, getting ready to go to Yale in the fall, and not quite sure where to call home. Mike is my oldest friend. We've been close since fifth grade. Back then he was a fat kid, but now he's a stud. Well, other people think he's a stud—he still sees a fat kid when he looks in the mirror. I guess it takes some time to realize you've changed. People tell me I'm good-looking, but I hate my nose. Such a small Waspy nose. Weak. Wimpy.

The guys shower and we head up-Cape for some dinner. Mike has been to Cape Cod before with his parents and remembers a little fish place off the highway in Orleans. I've never even heard of it. That means it's



probably crummy, but I look at Mike's face and can tell he wants to be there for the memories. So we go.

Plastic lobsters line the walls in fisherman nets that have never seen the water. The menu doubles as a place mat and has all sorts of illustrations for the mentally slow tourists. It's fairly insulting that restaurants on the Cape have to cater to tourists. What can you do?

We ask the hostess to seat us in the smoking section. She shines a look at me and says, "It's all smoking," then follows up with a giggle. She has olive skin and thick, curly black hair. It touches her shoulders but doesn't cover them completely. Her eyes are a blue I've never seen before. They remind me of the ocean after a storm has passed and everything is calm again. I wonder why anyone who radiates beauty like this would be working in a restaurant called the Crab Tree.

Once seated, we ask for an ashtray. She goes looking for one, then comes back, embarrassed.

"This is the nonsmoking section." She gives me a wink. "Sorry. It's my first day." As she walks away, I notice she's tall and slender with the hint of a small belly only a privileged few may see. Her voice is soft and—

"Painter! You ready to order or what?" Gonzo is good at intruding. "What are you thinking about? That chick? The hostess? She's fucking hot, huh? How old do you think she is?"

"Twenty-two, twenty-three. What does it matter? She's way out of our league."

"Are you kidding me!?" Mike pipes in. "Al, you are a good-looking guy. You're smart, you're rich, and your folks have a beautiful house on Cape Cod!"

"I'm not rich."

"Painter, you're loaded and you know it," Gonzo jumps on board.

"You guys ever hear of the middle class?"

"All right, be middle class, so long as you pay for my dinner, you rich pussy motherfuck!" Gonzo yells it loud and all the tables within earshot stop eating to look up at us with disgust.

"Gonzo, don't make me take you outside and throw you a beatin'." I really hope that ends the conversation. But it doesn't.

"You couldn't beat your meat."

"You would be thinking about that, wouldn't you." I'm trying to play it tough, but I hate situations like this. What's the point? Aren't we supposed to be friends?

"Hey, Al." Gonzo smiles in a particularly unpleasant way, like it hurts, but he kind of enjoys the pain. "You ever been in a fight?"

"Are you always this nice to your hosts?" Now I sound weak, even to myself.

"I'm not sayin' you're a bad guy, Al. But you are a pussy. Everybody knows that."

Ever since Rebecca did it, I have these episodes that hit me out of the blue. I feel an unstoppable need to bawl my eyes out. For no reason. It's humiliating. So I take a deep breath and look down. Mike is saying something funny, trying to move past this awkward moment, but all I hear is my father's voice from when I was a kid and crying to him because a bigger kid was picking on me.

"You have to have backbone in this world, Alexander.

*You won't go anywhere if you're afraid to stand up to a bully. A beating to your body is no fun, but a beating to your ego can be far more damaging."*

This was before Rebecca, that's my sister, before Rebecca got so depressed and killed herself in the upstairs bathroom of our house in Brooklyn. It was two and a half years ago, but to look at my parents, you'd think not more than a week had gone by. They don't take much of an active role in my life since that day Mom found her.

I miss the talks me and my dad used to have. Or the walks through the botanical gardens in Brooklyn with my mom and Rebecca on the first day of spring every year. Maybe we'll do it again someday. You never know. Anyway, I'm not a rich pussy. It's true that I've never been in a fight, but that's only because I've really never had a reason to fight. I would though, I tell myself. If I had to, I would fight. I'm not scared. I think I'm not.

**LATER THAT NIGHT**, we drive down Commercial Street, the main strip in P-town, looking for girls. Commercial Street is where all the tourist girls leave their mommies and daddies at the hotel and go out to discover what this place is really about. The local guys are the girls' tools for having a wild time. That's what they really want—to go on vacation with their parents and tell their friends back home that they hooked up with a local boy. If he's Portuguese, that's even better. Now the local boy is probably going to end up catching fish for a living, which the tourist girls won't like in a few years, but right now he's a ton of fun, an adventure. They see the local guys as even a little dangerous. They like that.

I'm not the best at picking up girls. In fact I stink at it. My nature doesn't allow for sticking my head out the car window and yelling at people I don't know. I guess the positive way to look at it is I'm more of the silent type. This is not a problem when I'm with my local P-town friends, who consider me half a townie. But I am not with my local friends tonight.

"Look at these fuckin' girls! Mike, have you ever seen so many hot chicks? This is some town you live in, Al. Stop the car!"

"I can't. It's a one-way street, full of traffic, and there's a cop staring right at me." I'm certain Gonzo will cave to my logic.

"What are you, kidding me? There's three girls over there and they're checking us out! If you do not stop this car, right now, I swear to God, I will piss all over your backseat." Gonzo would, too, the pricknut.

"Absolutely not. I am not getting a ticket. Zero possibility. That cop doesn't like us already because of your New York plates. No way, no dice, no chance, no how."

An hour later we're at my house doing shots of Popov vodka with the three girls Gonzo saw on the street. A forty-dollar ticket for "reckless driving in a densely populated area" weighs heavy in my back pocket, but I don't care. And the reason I don't care is because one of the three girls Gonzo somehow managed to pick up on Commercial Street happens to be the most beautiful girl I have ever seen in my life, the hostess from the Crab Tree.

"Hello," she says when she gets in the passenger's seat next to me. Her friends squeeze in the back with Gonzo and Mike.

"Alexander Painter," I manage to blurt out, extending my hand to shake hers in an unusually formal manner for some reason, only God knows why. She gets a very serious look in her face, then grabs my hand firmly while locking my eyes with hers. And then she smiles the brightest smile.

"I'm Celosia." I feel the skin of her hand, tender and warm, and with a fair number of callouses, evidence of the hard work she has obviously had to do all her life.

"Celosia," I repeat, "I've never heard a name like that. Does it mean something?"

"It's the name of a flower."

"What kind of flower?"

"A flower with plumelike spikes." She smiles at me. I'm going to have something special with Celosia. I feel it in my bones, in my heart. She's the One.

Gonzo downs his eighth or ninth shot—I've lost track at this point—then suggests we all drive around the town in his Corolla, and for another reason none of us can really figure out, we all go along with it and drive towards Herring Cove Beach.

Celosia is nineteen, grew up in Provincetown, but had to move to Wellfleet when she was sixteen, forced to change schools at exactly the same time in life that I was. All six of us are in the car, but I am alone with Celosia. We arrive at the beach and go for a late-night swim in our underwear. As Mike and I watch the girls strip down and enter the water, he puts his arm around my shoulder and whispers in my ear:

"I really like Cape Cod, bro. I really like it."

"What's not to like?" I say and swim over to Celosia. She has a boyfriend, Ivory. Been with him for two years. I don't know anything about Ivory. Anything except that I hate him.

At dawn we drive the girls back to Celosia's car, where we have a hasty good-bye due to one of her friends being late for her opening shift at the A&P. Celosia and I awkwardly do a half hug / half kiss on the cheek, but the corners of our lips connect. She holds for a moment, then another moment, and another. Finally her friend honks the horn and everybody laughs. She smiles at me, hops in the car, and speeds off; the look in her eye suggesting she knows there's a piece of me going with her already. Celosia.

Mike and Gonzo leave shortly after the girls, heading back to Brooklyn. I'm sad to see them go. Who knows when we'll all be together again? They're not the best guys in the world, but they're real, and they have my back. I still haven't found my place in Provincetown. All my friends here are real nice, but still, I feel like an outsider. I suppose everyone does. Most people probably just don't think about it as much as I do.

Speaking of thinking, I can't stop thinking about Celosia. Should I drive down to Orleans and surprise her at work? Will she think that's romantic or sketchy? I know she's got a boyfriend, but I can't get Celosia's smile out of my head.

**AS I'M ON** my way to the Crab Tree, the DJ reminds me there's only one more day to the Fourth of July. I pull into the parking lot and head for the



Through the window, I see her standing at the postess station. She's daydreaming, thinking about something, or is it someone?

"Surprise," I whisper as I come up behind her.

She smiles and throws her arms around me.

"I knew you would come." She says it to me like we've known each other for lifetimes. She's such an old soul.

"You wanna see a movie after I get you off?"

She is shocked for a second, then smiles at me, realizing I am clueless. And then it dawns on me.

"I mean after you get off work."

"That's not what you said." She throws me a stern look. Oh my God, did I just blow it? She sees how scared I am and gives me that smile I have already become addicted to.

"You're just fucking with me, aren't you?"

"Absolutely," she tells me.

"Absolutely you're fucking with me? Or absolutely you want to go to a movie?"

"Absolutely both."

**I DRIVE TO** the theater and realize there's nothing playing that late. So I go back to the Crab Tree and wait in my car until she gets off at ten. Her mother is away on vacation. Celosia has the house to herself, so we go there.

Her house is fairly deep into the Wellfleet woods. Her room is on the first floor. We sit on the bed and talk about how she's unhappy with her boyfriend, this Ivory guy. He's a gun-dealer from New York who comes up here a lot so he can be with Celosia

and his friends. My local friends are his friends too. Why I've never met him, I don't know. But I do know that Celosia makes him sound nasty. I wonder why this angel would be with a scumbag like that. She could be with me.

I'm about to tell her to dump him and run away with me, when I hear someone yell "BOO!" from the other side of the screen door leading to her driveway. It's Ivory. Having just been with Mike and Gonzo for the past two days gives me the attitude I need to face him. I won't wait for him to take charge—I'll get up and introduce myself.

"How you doin', Ivory? I've heard a lot about you. I'm Al. We have some friends in common."

"Friends in common?" he says to me. "Who you talkin' about?" He's not as big as I thought he'd be, but he sure looks tougher than me.

"Oh, come on. I know Pete and Jeb and Dave and Jesse and Josiah and Robin and Gabe. You do know them, don't you?" He's taken back by this. He says nothing and gives Celosia a look I don't like. She goes outside with him and they exchange a few words I cannot hear, then he leaves. Celosia comes back inside, shaking her head.

"Ivory—the only gun-dealer in the world who thinks he's a college professor."

"He didn't look all that professorial to me."

She laughs, but not like it's funny, then shakes her head again. "You know what he got me for my birthday? G-strings. After being together for three years, he gets me a thong for my birthday."

"What a pudknocker."

She moves closer to me. I can feel my heart beating faster and suddenly it feels like every ounce of blood in my body has rushed to the front of my pants. I've never had a hard-on like this in my entire life!

"What's a pudknocker?" she whispers.

"Ivory is a pudknocker."

"You do use the craziest words, Alexander."

"Thanks."

"That's why I like you," she says, her lips an inch from mine, her body pressed up against the hardness in my pants. "You know who you are. You know where you're going. You'd never hurt me, would you, Alexander?"

"I'd never let anything or anyone ever hurt you, Celosia." I feel something I've never felt before and suddenly I understand sex in a way that was always a mystery to me until this moment; my body is screaming to make a child with this girl. Everything in me burning to be inside her at all costs.

Her fingers move towards my shoulders now and I think I might explode from nothing more than her touch. I feel myself falling forward into her lips. So soft. They cradle mine. I spend the night there, but she doesn't want me to take her clothes off, she only wants me to hold her. So I hold her. I hold her all night long. She does, however, let me put my hand on her bare tummy, and I rub it gently until she falls asleep with a smile on her face. Celosia, the girl of my dreams.

**I GET HOME** from work the next day and call her first thing. She sounds happy to hear my voice and agrees that the hours since I left her place this morning feel like days.

"Ivory came by and got all his stuff," she tells me.

"What did he have to say?"

"He called me a whore, among other things."

"But all we did was cuddle."

"I told him that. He didn't believe me—" We're interrupted by her call-waiting. And while I wait for her to come back to me, I think about how nice it must have been before call-waiting, when you weren't getting interrupted all the time by whoever wanted to get a hold of you. I carried a beeper for a little while, but gave it up. I started finding that if someone beeped me when it wasn't a good time to call them back, they would take offense. Now I even see a few kids with cell phones. Crazy.

Celosia clicks back to me. "Alexander, are you still there?" She sounds slightly disturbed.

"Of course. Is everything okay?"

"That was Ivory."

"What did he say?" I'm almost scared to ask, she sounds so serious.

"He said, 'Alexander Painter is going to bleed tonight.' ... Hello, are you still there?"

I feel a chill shoot down my spine, but my voice remains calm. "I'm still here. That really sucks!"

"I don't think you should go out tonight," she tells me, but her voice goes up at the end, as if it were a question. Before she got so depressed, when I was a little kid, Rebecca once told me that when a girl is telling you to do the safe thing, but it sounds like a question, even just a little bit, she's really testing you to see how brave you are and whether or not she wants to procreate with you. It was a lot to lay

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on a nine-year-old, but that was Rebecca.

"Stop being ridiculous. It's the Fourth of July. Of course I'm gonna go out. . . . Aren't you coming to Aria's party?" I try to say it nonchalantly.

"He's not kidding, Alexander. Ivory is dangerous." Now she sounds like she does mean it. Shit, which is it? "He's really, really dangerous."

"So am I. I gotta go. I'll see you." I hang up before she can tell how scared I really am. Fuck! I should have known this was too good. Is nothing in life free? Do you always have to pay one way or another? My father told me that, right after I found out Rebecca had done it, slit her wrists in the tub I mean. I didn't know what he meant at the time, but now I understand.

If only I could go back to the time when I didn't, when I was innocent. . . . Or is it ignorant? Does it even matter?

I walk downtown to a head shop where I know I can get a butterfly knife. It's a good knife to have because it takes skill to open properly, and it's a pretty fancy display when you do it right. That's another thing Rebecca taught me, how to open a knife.

The guy who works the knife counter is from Brooklyn, too. His name is Vasquez. He usually talks a lot of smack, but today he just looks at me funny, like he knows what's going down. He's also got two black eyes for some reason. I try not to let it bother me, but it feels like a bad omen to have the guy who's selling me my weapon, look like he just lost a fight.

**I GO TO** Aria's beach party over at Herring Cove. There are bonfires and coolers filled with beer and every kind of alcohol you can imagine. Aria does it right on the Fourth of July. I can see crowds of people laughing in the glare of the flames and getting drunk. Ivory is gonna be here. Everyone is gonna be here. And everyone knows what's going down. P-town is a very small town at the end of the day. I can feel the excitement of danger pulsing through the crowd. What kind of a show are we going to give them? The knife sits heavy in my pocket.

I take a shot of vodka to loosen up. Friends are trying to get me to smoke weed, but that will only dull my reflexes. I need to stay sharp for this.

Then I see Ivory. He arrives in his pickup truck. He's alone. After a quick scan, he spots me out of the crowd and heads straight for me. There's a good chance I'm going to vomit. As he gets closer, I think of Celosia's belly, and how nice it was to feel its bare warmth on my hand. I think about how that one time may have been the last. Was it worth it? I like this girl, but do I like her enough to bleed? Either way I'm not going to spend the rest of my life with her. How long could it last realistically? I'm going away to college in less than two months, and she's going back for her second year. Sure, she stayed faithful to Ivory, but maybe all the guys were just too scared to go for her because of exactly what is about to happen to me.

I watch Ivory getting closer to me, see the rage in his eyes, and I get it; this is not about her anymore. If I told Ivory that it was over between me and Celosia, that I swore I'd never see her again, he'd

attack anyway. This is about power. Me against a bully. Fuck him, I've got backbone.

There's a bulge under Ivory's jacket. Is it a gun? It's gotta be a gun.

He gets close to my face, as close as Celosia was when she put her hands on my shoulders just before she kissed me for the first time.

"I'm surprised to see you out tonight," he says to me.

"It's the Fourth of July. Haven't you been listening to the radio?"

"That supposed to be funny? Come here, we're gonna take a walk."

He puts his arm around me and walks me away from the party. I have zero control over the direction we're going. The bonfire feels miles away. When he thinks we've gone far enough, he stops and faces out to the water.

"I'm gonna be honest, I was gonna kill you. No, don't laugh, cause it ain't funny. You were nearly a dead man tonight." I have my fingers on the knife, but it's no good. My hands are so sweaty I'm afraid I'll drop it if I try to whip it out.

"Then something happened," he continues. "I realized that you ain't never been in love. Cause if you had, you would never have done what you did. You took the only thing in this world I actually care about other than myself away from me. Now, aside from how stupid a move that is simply in regards to your own personal well-being, what it truly displays is a severe lack of any sort of code." This guy is lecturing me about personal codes? This fucking gun-dealer?! But he goes on. "It displays a lack of integrity. Do you know what integrity means?"

"I'd like to hear your definition."

"Completeness. That's something you ain't got. You probably never will. You're not going to last with Celosia. But you know that, don't you? I loved that girl, and you fucked it up. Damn you, Alexander Painter. Because of you, we will never have what we did, and that's a shame. . . . Cause it was beautiful.

"So, when you break it off with her in a month or two, after you get to Yale and find yourself some Ivy League pussy, you think about me. Cause I'll still have integrity, but you won't have shit. And if you ain't got shit, then you ain't shit. Now you go live with that." He struts off.

Before I even know what's happening, the words are out of my mouth.

"Hey, Ivory!" He turns around. "You might have integrity, but I'm the one rubbing her belly tonight!"

## PART 2

### Ivory

Provincetown, Massachusetts  
July 2, 1995

**I LOOK TO** the dunes passing by on my left, and I can't help but think about how much I love Provincetown. How much I love and appreciate that this is the only town in the world a bum like me could be with a girl like Celosia.

Sometimes being here even allows me to forget who I am for a moment. But it's only for a moment. Cause no matter where I am, no matter where I go, when I look in the mirror, I see what everybody else sees—a fuckin' gun-dealer. If I'm not careful, that's all I'm ever gonna be.

When I was thirteen I ran away from home and linked up with some hippies who I was selling X to at a Phish concert. They brought me home with them to P-town and I saw a way of life I had no idea existed on this planet. After I ran out of X, the cops busted my ass for trying to steal a microwave burrito from Cumberland Farms and they sent me back to Harlem. My mother's boyfriend beat me, she didn't do nothin' to stop him, so I split again. This time I stayed in the city and learned real quick how to avoid the heat.

There was this dude, Julius, who musta' been on the streets his whole life. He kinda took me under his wing, showed me how to own the street as a kid. He got me started on reading. The first book he ever gave me was *The Great Gatsby*. I thought Gatsby was a punk-bitch. He don't know what hard is. But I could get down with the way Fitzgerald put the words together, and since it's not like I had a TV or nothin', books became my entertainment. Julius thought I was some kind of genius cause I got a photographic memory. He once said to me, "All this talent and you go and become a dealer of arms. . . . If you had parents, boy, they would be disappointed in you." After Julius finished his soliloquy, he shot up with what he thought was gonna be some real good smack. Unfortunately, it was liquid Drano. Julius died right there in front of me. I was fifteen. Rest in peace, Julius.

**I HAVE TO** see Celosia tonight. My local boys want me to hang, and I haven't chilled with them since I've been in town, but I gotta make things right with my girl first. Last time I was here it was Celosia's birthday and I fucked up big-time. I have a dope present being custom-made for her now, but at the time I didn't have no loot, so I got her a pair of thongs, just for fun. She got pissed, real pissed. Some girls just don't like those kind of jokes. But I'm gonna make up for that tonight. Whatever it takes. Cause I don't know what I would do without her. Celosia is everything good about my world. Everything pure. The only pure thing I ever known.

I go to Whalers Wharf, P-town's version of a mall in the center of town, to pick up her real present. The statue of the ballerina is made of crystal and has tiny diamonds imbedded in the front of it that spell out "Celosia." I paid an extra two hundred beans for those diamonds. That's how much I love my girl, sky's the limit.

**I ROLL UP** to Celosia's place at nine thirty to be there to surprise her. At eleven thirty she's still not home. She gets off work at ten. Where the fuck is she? I lie down on our bed and wait for her. Now it's four in the morning. Still no Celosia. Who is she with?

The worst thoughts are always the ones that come to me first. I see her in bed with some guy, loving him in ways she never has with me. Some fucking summer kid from Harvard with a silver



...up his ass. Her ticket to a better life. A life I know I'll never be able to give her. Scar- I knows at the end, right? His ride cut short just when he's got it all. I feel pain in my right arm and my forehead starts dripping sweat. She's licking his neck. Licking his neck and smiling at me. She smiles at me as he rides her up and down.

**I GO TO** the local head shop in town, to see if anyone there saw Celosia last night. The guy who works the knife counter is a Brooklyn bum named Vasquez, but he's all right, thrown me some business once or twice. No angel. Asked for twice his cut cause he drew a little bit of heat from one of our deals. Now I'm not pretending to be any kind of angel either. But I can say I have never wronged someone who didn't do something to me first. That's just my code. And if I were ever to break that, then I really would have nothing. So I gave him twice his cut, and I did it with a handshake and a smile. But Vasquez has been on shit-thin ice with me from there on out.

"Hey, Ivory, I didn't know you were in town."

"Why would you?"

"I got this town on lockdown, son. I see people, I see things, *ese*." I can't stand when this clown pulls out that *ese boricua* shit, like he's so hard cause he grew up in Brooklyn. Shit, he probably grew up in Brooklyn Heights.

"You know who my girl is, right?"

"Yeah, Celooooosia." He draws out the "O" and I don't like the way her name sounds on his tongue.



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"She's foxy, bro."

"That's a lot coming from you."

"No problemo." This fucking guy.

"Did you see her last night?"

"Yeah, man." Vasquez takes awhile before he says the next part. "You ain't gonna like it."

"Tell me."

"Are you sure? You're really not gonna like it."

"I can take it, I'm tougher than I look."

"Information costs money, bro. What's in it for me?"

I grab him by the ears and push my thumbs into his eyes, just hard enough so he'll stop fuckin' around and tell me what I want to know. He'll have a couple of shiners for a few days, but he'll live.

"One more time, then I'm gonna get nasty. Who was Celosia with last night?"

"Some guys from Brooklyn."

"Friends of yours?"

"Nah, they was tourists!"

"All of them?"

"I seen one around before. His family has a house on Commercial."

"Tell me his name." I am calm.

"Painter, Alexander Painter."

Alexander Painter. When I find you, I'm scared of what I'm gonna do to you.

**IT'S TEN THIRTY** and I've been driving around all night. The ballerina statue sits on the seat next to me where Celosia should be. I drive to her house and this punk-bitch Painter has his car parked in my spot. Even got a Yale sticker on his bumper. I park at the foot of her driveway so they won't hear me coming up on them and creep up to her window. Inside I see the two of them sitting on our bed, and it's so obvious, it hits me in the gut like a fuckin' brick; it's their bed now. What happened? When did this happen? I walk around to the front door. She's got the screen latched but the door is wide open, so they can feel the cool summer breeze as they laugh. I stand there for a minute looking at them through the haze of the metal screen. She's looking at him the way she looked at me when we first got together and everything was possible. Before I fucked up one too many times. I can't watch this shit anymore. And so I yell:

"BOO!"

They jump at first, but then this skinny punk has the balls to come up on me.

"How you doin', Ivory? I've heard a lot about you. I'm Al. We have some friends in common."

This is Alexander Painter? This lil' pussy? Thinks he's all that cause he's from Brooklyn? All these bitches from Brooklyn thinkin' they so hard. Shit, this ain't even gonna be a challenge. "Friends?" I say to him. "Who you talkin' about?"

"Oh, come on. I know Pete and Jeb and Dave and Jesse and Josiah and Robin and Gabe. You do know them, don't you?" This motherfucker just rattled off a list of my boys. Like dropping a few names is gonna get him out of this ditch he's dug himself. I'll deal with this piece soon enough. Oh, I'll take care of him. But first, I give Celosia a look to tell her I want to talk to her outside. She at least does me the courtesy of excusing herself from this punk-bitch's presence long enough to tell me what I gotta hear.

"What do you want to talk to me about?" she says.

"Why you doing this?"

"I think you should leave, Ivory." It really is over.

"You're not even going to make up some bullshit excuse for why you been running around with this punk?"

"We were just talking. Am I allowed to talk to people, or do I need your permission?"

"What are you talking permission? You don't have enough love and respect for us to be straight with me now? You don't have that?"

"This is not about you, Ivory. Things aren't always about you. Go home. Please."

"Celosia, I love you. Don't throw that away. Cause if you do, we're all gonna regret this for the rest of our lives."

"Go home, Ivory. You can come back tomorrow to get your stuff." She turns away from me and stares into the woods. I'm a stranger to her now. She doesn't even remember why she used to love me.

I feel the tears welling up in my head. They're gonna hit my eyes soon. No stopping it now. This is going to hurt. But I need one more look at her. So, I give it all I have to hold back the tears so I can at least protect her from the pain she doesn't even realize she's created because of this clown. At least for one more night.

I go home, like she told me, and I drink a bottle of Jack Daniel's. Then I smash the crystal statue on the floor. I take off my shirt and roll around on the broken shards. Every time I move I can feel a piece of Celosia's broken statue enter my body. The pain takes over everything until it hurts so much I can't see her face anymore. All I see is pain. Pain and Alexander Painter. I see his face and I know I can take all this hurt inside of me, all the pain I had to carry with me my whole life, and I can blast that shit into him. That's right, Al, you'll understand what you've done. You opened the door and I'm part of your mothafucking life journey now. You've done wrong to me. You don't even begin to understand who you're fucking with! Now you're gonna take whatever the fuck I want to give you! Prepare yourself, Alexander Painter. Your world is about to change.

**I WAKE UP** the next morning and I drive over to Celosia's to get my stuff. I let myself into the bedroom. She has everything in a box. The G-string is laying on top. She's on the phone, but hangs up as soon as she sees my face.

"You have a good night?" I ask her as I look around for anything she might have kept for herself.

"All we did was cuddle."

"You're a liar and a whore." I don't see anything.

"We had a connection. Do you understand that? A connection!"

"Whore."

"Fuck you, Ivory."

"Yeah, you did. You really fucked me."

"Get out of my house."

I can't breathe.

"I guess in the end, we were lucky it happened the way it did. I know it wasn't easy—going to the clinic... losing everything like that." I can't believe I'm doing this to her, but it's like I'm possessed; I



can't stop myself. "I mean, the world didn't need another unwanted kid, right?"

She stiffens and puts her arms around her stomach. I hate myself for letting those words come out of my mouth. She's crying now, holding the hollow space where once upon a time our future wanted to grow.

Tears are spilling down her cheeks now. All I want to do is hold her and tell her I'm sorry. Tell her everything's gonna be all right. That we'll work it out. But she can't even look at me. And I've never been much of a liar. So that's it. Like flipping a light switch, click, the love is dead.

I go home to clean and load my gun. For myself, I carry a .45 automatic. I've never had to use it. But there truly is a first time for everything.

I call Celosia.

"What do you want, Ivory?"

"I want you to know Alexander Painter is going to bleed tonight."

**I'M AT HERRING** Cove beach. It's 10:38 PM. I know he's here. I know because he is the first and only person I see the moment I roll up to the party. He is alone. This is it. Destiny.

I get out of my truck and walk towards him through the crowd. But instead of seeing the sights of the party around me, my eyes are filled with images from random moments in my life, like a movie I can't stop or even walk out of. My father leaves my mother, I am very small. Life on the streets. A pimp takes a carrot-peeler to my twelve-year-old cheek, slices off a strip of my flesh and eats it, telling me that now he got a piece of my flesh inside him, he owns my ass forever. I kill that motherfucka in his sleep with that same carrot-peeler. I see so many things, but they all lead me back to the vision I came here to create, the image of Alexander Painter, bleeding on the sand. I'm about to reach him, when a voice slaps me in the face like a billboard. And it's my voice:

"If you're not careful, a fuckin' gun-dealer is all you're ever gonna be."

I see myself shooting Alexander Painter, and I know I can't do this. I can't. He's right in front of me now. I have to say something.

"I'm surprised to see you out tonight." I barely manage to get the words out.

"It's the Fourth of July. Haven't you been listening to the radio?" Don't do that. Don't play the tough guy.

"That supposed to be funny?" Take control, Ivory. "Come here, we're gonna take a walk."

I put my arm around him tight and realize how scared he is. The stink of fear seeping from his pores. Spineless. Parthenic. I'm not gonna end my life for this piece of shit. But, before I let him go, this Alexander Painter is going to understand what he did, and when I'm done, he ain't never gonna be the same again.

I take him away from the party. Far away. Into the dark.

"I'm gonna be honest with you, I was gonna kill you." He starts to laugh like this is a joke, the dumb fuck. "No, don't laugh, cause it ain't funny. You were nearly a dead man tonight. But fortunately for you, I realized something, which is that

you ain't never been in love. Cause if you ever had been in love with someone, truly, you wouldn't a done what you did. You took away the only thing in this world I actually care about other than myself. Now, aside from how stupid a move that is simply in regards to your own personal well-being, what it truly displays to me, is a lack of any sort of code. A lack of integrity . . . do you know what integrity means?"

"I'd like to hear your definition."

"Completeness. That's something you ain't got. You probably never will." He's trying to put on his tough guy face, but he's shittin' his pants. So I take a pause, and then I go on. "You're not going to last with Celosia. But you know that, don't you? I loved that girl and she loved me and you fucked that up. The most beautiful thing I'll ever see in my life, gone because of you."

"So, when you break it off with her in a month or two, you think about me. Cause that's when you're gonna grow up and realize that I still have integrity, but you ain't got shit. And if you ain't got shit, then you ain't shit. Now you go live with that." I walk off, content. And for a moment, I glimpse a future where I am not just a gun-dealer, a future where I actually do something with my life, something I can be proud of. And the moment is beautiful.

Then he calls to me.

"Hey, Ivory!"

I take out my gun and turn around, cause I know what comes next. Cause I know the moment is already gone. Did I ever have a chance of living that moment? Was the game rigged from the start?

"You might have integrity, but I'm the one rubbing her belly tonight!"

Do any of us ever really know how quickly it comes and goes before it's already passed us by?

Before I know what's happened, I see Alexander Painter laying before me, bleeding onto the sand. Three bullet holes in his belly. I drop the gun. Everything is quiet now.

## PART 3 Celosia

Provincetown, Massachusetts  
July 7, 1995

**A**LEXANDER'S MOTHER CRIES all the way through her son's funeral. His father remains stoic, or perhaps he's in shock. I cannot imagine what it would be to bury one child, to say nothing of two. Still, I'm surprised his parents decided to have the services here at Saint Mary's. I figured they'd want an up-scale funeral back in New York. But I guess they moved to P-town for the shelter of it all. So many people come here for that.

I want to go up to them, tell them how much I cared about their son, even in the brief time we had together. Tell them how sorry I am for their loss, and how I will always take responsibility for a lot of what happened out there on that beach. I want so badly to tell the Painters how their boy did

not die in vain, how if he had not done what he did, something in my soul tells me it would have been me lying in my blood on the sand, Ivory standing above me. Of course I can't prove it. How could anyone prove such a thing? But I know. If I could, I would tell the Painters how in the short eighteen years of his life their son, Alexander, truly became a man. And how proud they deserve to be, because by saving my life, he did more with his eighteen years than most men do with eighty.

But I don't go up and talk to them. I wouldn't want to see the girl who got my boy killed, either. Right now, that's all they will be able to see if they look at me. So instead, I say a prayer and take one of the white roses from the altar down to the beach where he died. I throw the rose into the bay and watch it as the sun sets and its petals separate one by one, free to ride the tide out to the sea.

Some tourists are drinking around a bonfire, and it makes me think of the stories my *avó* told me about life in Santa Maria in the Azores, about the fishermen who brought their ships too close to the lights onshore and ended up crashing into the rocks. She said people lit those bonfires to lure the fishermen in, knowing the ships would crash and could be scavenged. I always wondered why the lit fires didn't warn those ships away. Perhaps after being out at sea for so long, the sight of the lights was just too hard to resist.

It's dark now and I can't see the flower anymore. I walk back to the parking lot. The tourists—a family with some teenagers—are getting louder. In a few weeks they'll be gone, leaving only the die-hard year-rounders to inhabit this slice of land at the tip of America. We'll have this magical place back to ourselves again. Locals and washashores—fishermen, descendants of fishermen, artists, children of artists, gays, straights, bi-curious. Provincetown, where the only rule is you have to be yourself, yourself and no one else.

People who were born here call themselves locals but the truth is this land doesn't belong to any of us. Not to Ivory, or Al, or even my grandmother. It doesn't belong to us, because sooner or later, everyone leaves. Sooner or later, everyone who comes here to experience the madness and the magic, eventually takes what they learned with their time here, and moves on, washed back out to sea.

Even if it was just for one day, that magical and mad set of twenty-four hours is more than enough for me to know how far ahead of the game I am already. For to have touched true love while here in Provincetown is to know a taste of the lips from your own personal paradise, the one that awaits you on the other side of your journey. And they're all unique. And the best part is you get to make your own rules there, just like here. In my paradise, seconds last for years, and one day can count for a lifetime. So I won't cry again until I get to end of my journey, and finally join the others who came before me, then went back out with the tide when their time had come.

**IT'S SEVERAL MONTHS** before I hear from him. Then one day I get a letter and it sends a shiver down my spine. I do not know it at the time, but this is the last letter Ivory will ever write.



losia,  
I'm guessing you know I'm doing life at Walpole,  
I won't waste time with the details of how I got  
caught. That doesn't matter anyway. I want you to  
know I think about that night on the beach with every  
waking moment and in my dreams. What it all means.  
I'm not pretending to have any answers, but of all  
the questions I have, two haunt me most:

WHAT HAPPENED TO HIS SOUL?

and

WAS IT WORTH IT?

Like clockwork, at 10:41 PM, Alexander Painter  
appears in my cell and whispers to me. Every night  
since I killed him, for seven months, he has come to

me and said nothing but these words, "I still have  
integrity, and you ain't got shit."

But last night was different. Last night his words  
were not the same. I'm praying that you know some-  
thing, something you can tell me about him that will  
make sense out of what he said to me. I'm begging  
you, if you know anything, please write me back and  
explain why I feel the way I do. If you ever loved me  
at all, tell me what he's done to me, what he's planted  
in my head. Please.

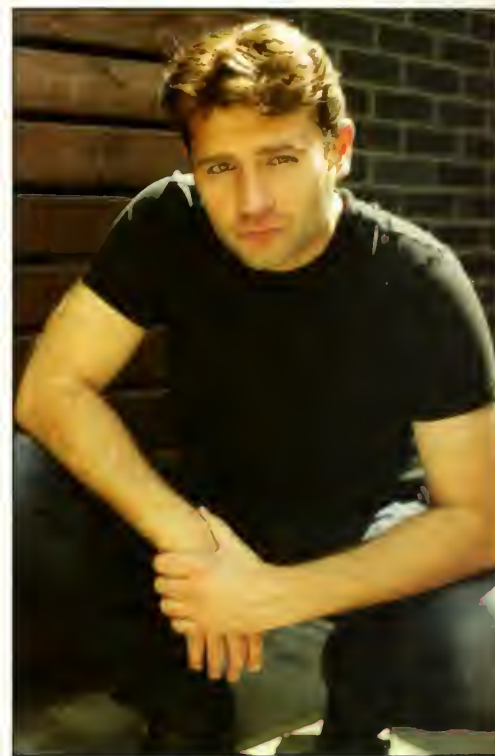
I'll end this letter with his words. If I don't hear  
back from you, I will never bother you again. But I  
had to tell someone.

Alexander Painter's ghost sat there next to me, a  
grin on his face.

"Rebecca is looking forward to meeting you. She  
says she'll be seeing you soon."



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He is a founding member of Back House Productions,  
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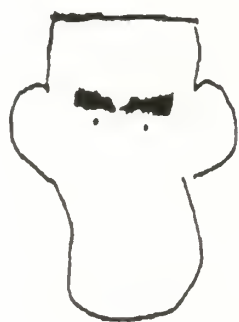
JOHN BUFFALO MAILER PHOTO BY KATRINA EUGENIA

numerous publications, including *Playboy*, *Province-  
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# HIS FIRST EXPERIENCE

By A. Igoni Barrett



A. IGONI BARRETT PHOTO BY FOLARIN SHASANYA

**I**T HAPPENED WHEN he was thirteen, a junior in boarding school in Jos, his first experience, and the memory, like a herpetic rash, stayed with him, hard to live with at first, then easier, endurable, a blemish he only saw when he was looking, and later not even then. The littlest details, the emotions awoken in him, everything was remembered. (A hot, crescent-moon night and the old ceiling fan squeaked and shook the dormitory walls and blew gusts of warm air on his and M.'s bare smooth bodies as they tussled silently in play, as young boys will, in the top bunk, M.'s position, which he had climbed into because his bunk at the bottom on that night was unbearable, stifling, no air, and M. didn't mind sharing. M. was his bunkmate, his senior, three years older and two classes higher, and his best friend, too. So it was OK that M. was touching, and he touched back. Then M. got hard, and he found that he grew hard, too. Breathless whispering, the rasp of shorn scalps, dry timid kisses, tongue explorations, the wash of mingled breathing and swallowed gasps, the scent of heated skin, a frenzied, reckless slide into abandon. In the end M. wheedled, convinced him to be the one, and he turned over onto his belly, buried his face in the pillow, and with a little saliva and much effort, M. penetrated. Two thrusts and he pushed M. away, it hurt too much. Then, afterwards, the shame, the recurrent fear of retribution, and a shared secret between schoolmates that could never be spoken about. That night their friendship began to end.)

Time passed, he got a girlfriend, never saw her breasts, broke up, fell in love with the girl of his dreams, who happened to live on his street, then fell out with her over her readiness to be the one. More time passed, he entered university to study Islamic law, grew a beard, graduated with honors, cut off his beard, moved to the US, missed his father's funeral, became a tenured professor in a small-town college in Michigan, disappointed his mother's yearning for a grand wedding and grandchildren, relocated at sixty-one to Massachusetts, sang karaoke duets with a tall, pretty, chain-smoking drag queen most nights of the summer season at Governor Bradford's in Provincetown—never forgot.



*A. IGONI BARRETT was born in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, in 1979. He won the 2005 BBC World Service Short Story Competition and is the recipient of a Chinua Achebe Center fellowship, a Norman Mailer Center fellowship, and a Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center residency. His latest collection of short stories is forthcoming from Graywolf Press in 2013.*





ROBERT SHUSTER

# TO ZENZI

By Robert Shuster

**S**ET AT THE very end of the Second World War, my novel *To Zenzi* follows the harrowing journey of thirteen-year-old Tobias Koertig and his girlfriend, Zenzi Fuchs, through the apocalypse of ruined Berlin and beyond. Narrated by Koertig himself, an old man now living in seclusion, the story recounts a series of increasingly strange events that shake the boy's deepest convictions and test his courage.

A scrawny kid with a remarkable talent for drawing, Tobias reluctantly joins the German youth army after the air-raid deaths of his parents and soon finds himself mistaken for a hero on the Eastern Front. When the Führer awards Tobias the Iron Cross, he discovers the boy's skillful cartoons and orders him to become his street-level observer, delivering daily sketches of Berlin.

As Tobias shuttles between the Führerbunker's delusional occupants and the chaotic streets, he naively accepts other tasks: sheltering a deceitful deserter, stealing gold for a conniving Martin Bormann, and entertaining the Führer with architectural fantasies. Tobias, too, grows increasingly close to Zenzi, a brainy teenager of Jewish descent (a so-called *mischling*, still able to live in Berlin) who opens the boy's eyes to the secret truth of the death camps. After Tobias commits a desperate and fateful act, he and Zenzi try to escape the Russian occupation and make their way to the Americans, to what they hope is safety and a new life.

The story, frequently pairing the tragic and the absurd, reflects my longtime interest in cracking open the standard myths of war. I can trace back the origin of *To Zenzi* to historian Alan Bullock's *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, a book I was reading for research on a work of nonfiction. Though I'd known some details of Hitler's last days, I found Bullock's descriptions of the madness fascinating. Soon I was imagining a novel, and started going through dozens of accounts detailing the fall of Berlin.

In this excerpt, taken from two early chapters, Tobias heads to the Eastern Front with his ragtag unit of boy soldiers—but not before a startling encounter.



## from Chapters 9 and 10

**I**N APRIL OF 1945, at the age of thirteen in a ruined Berlin, I, Tobias Koertig, became a soldier in the German army—though, you should understand, not much of one. After only eight days of training, barely knowing how to fire a rifle, wearing a uniform two sizes too big, I made my first public march with a bunch of other boys, all in a ragged formation, to a U-Bahn station. The subway, still working despite all the air raids, would shuttle us to the zoo, where we would wait for the local train, the above-ground one, the S-Bahn, to take us beyond the city and into battle, into a future that seemed no more real than a cartoon. Our seventeen-year-old commander, Kameradschaftsführer Fenzel, wanted to show off his troops and ordered us to goose-step into the car. Our clatter sounded like tramps rummaging through a junkyard, and the lanky Paul Dohndorf, who could never march in step, accidentally kicked a woman in the shin. She cried until Fenzel gave her some cigarettes. So began our journey to the Eastern Front, where we all believed we would turn back the Russians.

At the Zoo station, we discovered that our train would not be arriving for another five hours. Mechanical problems with the engine as well as track damage from the enemy's bombs—which meant a change in routes, too, a roundabout way. There was confusion about what to do with us. Fenzel wanted us to stay put. At some point, however, we needed a meal, which had been planned for our arrival in Erkner, the end of the S-Bahn line. Finally the officers decided to march us to a bakery that was still operating in the wrecked city, warning us that anyone who missed the train would be hanged by wire like all deserters. My friend Albrecht Stalla—brawny, red-haired, a year old than I, and always talking about sex—laughed at this and said he knew where we could get better food plus entertainment, just a few blocks away.

I protested. "If we split off, Fenzel will hang us on the lamppost."

"Only if we miss the train. They won't even know we're gone. Tell him we were taking a piss and we didn't know where they went. We've got five hours. You want to sit around the station all day? Anyway, what did I promise you? A woman! Well, that's who we're going to see."

We managed with not so much guile to slip away from the others and into the city streets. He took me a little south of the zoo, to Wilmersdorf. More of the same here, smoking mounds of brick, a dead horse stripped of its flesh, black and stinking. The shells of burned-out buildings, like the ruins of castles, framed the gray sky with crumbling rows of window spaces. Plumbing pipes and electrical wires, coiled and tangled, had turned sections of the street into snake pits. We tried to look important, keeping our helmets on, as if sent on an official errand, and few even gave us second looks. I followed Stalla to a residence that stood alone on the block as if freshly built, four stories all in a miracle without damage, each with a little balcony and French doors. From a pocket, Stalla pulled out a small jar of perfume and instructed

me to dab it on my face, hands, and crotch. "She doesn't like it when you smell like a sewer." Stalla thrust his hand into his pants and rubbed, and I did the same.

We hurried up two dim flights of stairs and Stalla rapped on a door. We took off our helmets. A muffled voice answered and Stalla said, "Albrecht."

Immediately a woman stood before us, no taller than me, with brown curls and a flat oval face like a paper cutout and a long slender neck and small teeth the size of mints.

"Oh my God, Albie," she exclaimed, kissing him on the face, "you're a soldier. Look at you! Your hair! They've chopped it!"

"A little." He touched the sides and shrugged. "Tobias, this is Stefanie."

"Oh it's so sad," she said, "to see you in a uniform."

"What's the matter? We're going to send the Russians back to Moscow."

Stefanie looked at me with a half smile. The woman Stalla had sometimes called his "old maid," she was probably in her late twenties, young but not young. A tiredness clung to her. Dark-blue half-moons spread below her eyes like a clown's painted marks. Still, she was elegant in a black dress spotted with white polka dots, with a V of white embroidery in the front, and smelling of cinnamon. "So it's Tobias? And you're filled with the same kind of bravado?"

I nodded, afraid at the moment to speak. She reminded me of someone I used to know.

Stalla clapped me on the shoulder. "Tobias hoped to see a few things before he went to the front."

"They're not sending you outside Berlin, are they?"

"We're leaving on the train in a few hours. We're supposed to be at the station, but I wanted to see you."

Stefanie's lips—I could see they were cracked—closed over her teeth, and she took a step back. "A few hours. Well, of course you must come in."

We passed through a tiny kitchen where pieces of wood burned in an iron dish and kept something simmering in a pot, and then we entered a kind of parlor with lacy curtains, and a dark-blue wallpaper of densely patterned leaves, a hanging lamp with tassels (of course there was no electricity now), a potted fern, porcelain figurines everywhere of gods and goddesses and horses and sheep. That smell of cinnamon again, stronger. We fell into red upholstered chairs whose springs creaked. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed by the bombs. It reminded me of apartments I used to visit with my father, artists' places crammed with knickknacks and newspapers.

Stefanie sat across from us, crossing her bare legs. The day had become warm, she had left a window partly open, the curtains fluttered in a breeze, I heard a bird go *crip-crip-crip*. "There's soup cooking," she said, "nettles and two potatoes, it should be ready soon. Some biscuits, too. And beer." She shook a box and out fell several brown biscuits onto a silver tray. "I didn't think you would really join up."

Stalla flexed an arm. "I'm not a coward."

"Everyone tells me," she said, "that the Russians

can't be stopped. They could be here in a week or two."

Stalla leaped up and mimicked a machine gun with his hands, making a *ch-ch-ch-ch* sound, sweeping the imaginary weapon from side to side. "They won't get past *me*." He stood there grinning and Stefanie rose to kiss him again, this time on the lips.

"Let's eat the jam," she said, "and wash it down with beer." She unscrewed the lid and scooped out a greenish glob with a biscuit, and then pushed everything into her mouth at once. Stalla and I did the same, and I realized how hungry I was. When we ran out of biscuits, we used our fingers. It was only nine in the morning but we each sucked down a bottle of warm lager.

"So where are they sending you?" Stefanie asked me.

"The river," I said. "The Oder. Where the Russians are."

"You don't have any guns."

"They'll give them to us when we get there."

Stefanie chewed her biscuit, her small mouth pushing in and out, and stared beyond us at the blue wallpaper. Her eyes went liquid and blurry. "Albrecht," she said after another minute. "Your hands are sticky. Give them to me."

Stefanie clutched his fingers, shiny with the jam, and began to lick them. Her tongue went from one to the next and she did not raise her head. Stalla kept his hands still, palms up, and looked at her with a soft expression. I did not know what to do so I watched the curtain dance.

Now the air-raid siren started its rising wail and I could hear the rough vibrations of an airplane engine in the distance, and then the thud-thud and the splintering of an explosion. I said, "The bombers," and looked at the other two. Stefanie was standing before Stalla, kissing his neck, and he was whispering something to her. "We are being bombed," I said. "Is there a cellar?"

While one of his hands gripped Stefanie's polka dots, Stalla gestured with the other toward the ceiling. "Don't worry, they never fall here. My girl's an angel."

Stefanie grinned, her miniature teeth gleamed. "Albrecht, my little devil."

We remained in the apartment. The bombs came down, not very close, though at least one explosion made the curtains leap up like ballerinas. Stalla was pulling down the zipper on that polka-dot dress and he himself was standing in his underwear in a state of adult excitement. Very quickly the dress fell and Stefanie's white underpants were unhooked from her stockings and all of this also dropped around her feet in a kind of puddle and then I was very astonished to see her naked, a bony woman with breasts shaped like cones and a flat bottom and lots of hair in the middle that crept up to her belly button in a narrow straight line. Stalla was keeping his promise to me, for he turned and grinned before taking off his tunic and everything else. Meanwhile, I could smell smoke, the bombs had turned something into fire.

The two naked people—they did not seem like Stalla or Stefanie now—ordered me to follow them to the bedroom, which was also done up in the same style with porcelain and lace and tassels. They



the covers of the bed and rolled onto the floor. I sat on a chair in the corner and watched, as I was told, the first time I had ever seen such a thing. It was, I thought, like a wrestling match mostly, with one player having red hair and the opponent brown, one on top and thrusting, the other pinned and gasping.

"Why don't you draw us," Stalla said to me, for he knew that I had a talent for sketching pictures. "Something I can take to the front." And to Stefanie, he said, "Where's a pencil and paper? Koertig's an artist."

"In the cabinet"—*gasp*—"near the round table." She giggled and yelped.

"Get them, Koertig, and start. I want all the details."

I fetched the items and sketched them quickly, as best as I could under the circumstances of my nervous thrill. They demanded that I show them what I'd done, and they both cackled, much louder than normal, I thought.

"Come here, Tobias," Stefanie said. "Wouldn't you like to kiss me?"

But before I could move, the all-clear siren warbled and Stefanie sprang up with wide eyes and yelled, "The soup!" She rushed out wearing only pants to the kitchen. I was sheepish, not knowing how to act now. A short while later, Stefanie, back inside the polka dots, asked us to stay for a midday meal. Her soup of potatoes and nettles had not been ruined. From his pocket Stalla fished a windup watch his mother had given him and told Stefanie we still had plenty of time, and even though I wanted to leave because of my embarrassment, I nodded, adding, "We can't be late."

"What does it matter?" she said.

"The train leaves in three hours," I informed her. "If we miss it, Fenzel will hang us from a lamppost."

"Over in my neighbor's apartment," Stefanie said, "we could find shirts and pants that would fit you."

Stalla, sniffing the soup, buttoning his pants, shrugged. "We have everything we need."

"What I mean," Stefanie explained, "is that you could find civilian clothes."

"Why? We are soldiers."

"You don't *have* to be soldiers," she said.

Stalla gave her a fierce scowl. "What are you saying?"

"I don't want you getting killed!"

"Who is dying? Not us."

"Albrecht, don't be foolish. . ."

"You want us to desert the army like cowards? Is that it?"

"Not cowards," Stefanie said with a touch of impatience. "Smart boys who enjoy life."

Stalla made a sneering sound, hating to be called a boy. Because my embarrassment about the bedroom act still twisted in me, I looked away, at the curtains, when I said, "I'm not quitting, Stalla's not quitting. No one can quit. We can't become Bolsheviks."

"The war is lost. Everyone sees that."

"That's ridiculous," Stalla said, growing louder. His lips began to tremble. His face was sweaty, his arms shined, too. "Why are you saying these stupid things?"

"We have the super weapons," I said. "Powerful rockets and other things. We'll see them very soon, and then the situation will change."

"Albrecht, both of you, listen to me. You know what happened. Stalingrad finished us. Ever since, no matter what we hear, we have been squeezed—from the east, the west, the south. From the sky. It's almost over. What have those super rockets done? Killed civilians, nothing more. You are boys. You have lots of years ahead of you. Do you think these generals care what happens to you? Do you think Goebbels cares? They're tossing you into the fire. The battles will have no meaning. Don't go back to the station!"

"So we should let the Russians march into Berlin?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Let them. Learn their language. *Ya kbochu est*. I am hungry. It's a matter of survival now."

"Don't ever say that again," Stalla said.

"We are German," I stated, truly perplexed. "Berlin is German."

Stalla, I could see, was tensed up, his arms like springs compressed. "We are not letting these murderers into our city!"

"What do you think we did to them?" Stefanie yelled.

"They are murderers and rapists!" Stalla's lips, almost purple, were bared like an animal's and his teeth dripped froth or so it seemed. "They are criminals! I am German! I will not speak Russian!"

"I am talking about life!" Stefanie cried. "Life! It is better than lying dead in the mud!"

"Not if you are a coward."

I could see what Stalla was about to do, but I could not stop him, he seemed so taut and wild and full of danger. He gripped the handle of the soup pot and flung it at the wall the way he had thrown the practice grenades, with great force, with focused violence. The crash was like a small bomb. Porcelain figures shattered and the hot liquid and bits of potato and strings of wet nettles splattered over the blue wallpaper. A moment of emptiness came after this, none of us spoke. A profound sadness filled my gut, for I was very sorry to know that I would not be having soup. Finally Stefanie pressed both hands to her paper-cutout face and began to sob, murmuring to us, "Please leave. Go play soldier."

On the street Stalla realized he had left his helmet in the apartment. "Fenzel will punish you if there's nothing on your head," I said, urging him to go back up. Too steamed, he just clenched his hands. I stood there dazed in the sunshine.

At the station, we found that our train had come and gone earlier than anyone had thought, taking our group to the front without us. Another train, we were told, was due in an hour, so we waited with great worry as Stalla kept inventing excuses for us, each one more elaborate, that would somehow let us avoid Fenzel's certain punishment.



**A**FTER A SLOW ride on the S-Bahn, we finally caught up with our unit, a little over thirty kilometers from Berlin, at Fürstenwalde. Here we boarded another train, headed for the front. Our destination, north of us by a winding route, was somewhere near a place called Seelow—I had never heard of it. We stopped several times to pick up or drop off soldiers at tiny stations lit by a single blue light, where trucks hulked in the shadows.

Somewhere, much later in the night, the train slowed, crawling and wheezing for what seemed like a million kilometers, and finally jerked to a stop. Not a station, it was the middle of nowhere, the middle of blankness. Voices shot through the cars. "Everyone off! Maintain silence! No lights, no smoking! Honor your country and defeat the Bolsheviks with whatever means necessary!" Fenzel snarled at us to follow his blue light, which he pointed at the floor like an usher.

We stepped off the train into a breezy chill. The hunched and sleepy old men of the Volkssturm, who had traveled in a separate coach, were ordered into dimmed trucks, while most of the boys had to crawl onto wagons, pulled by thin, nervous horses. Stalla and I, along with Dohndorf and Klotz, who had not put his helmet back on, settled into one filled with hay and its bitter odor. I also smelled manure and mud, but I didn't mind, as it all reminded me of times in Switzerland. A single lantern revealed a farmer, not an officer, handling the reins, and this, too, gave me comfort. He whispered something to his animal and we set off with gentle creaking, followed by other carts carrying the rest of the boys and Fenzel.

Lightheaded from hunger and cold, I lay on my back, trying to sleep a little, hearing, as if in a dream, a thunderous rumble way off, and also a high-pitched whine, over and over, that sounded like a weird birdcall. Then it quit and there was nothing but the wagon's creak and the horse's clacking and Klotz's teeth chattering. Further on, my tired eyes went wide when we came around a small grove of trees and there were jagged flames rising in the distance, I could not tell how far. I thought, We are really at the front. And then pink daylight came to the sky when a miniature sun appeared and floated down. "It is God," I said, half believing it.

"A flare," said Stalla.

Dohndorf hissed through his teeth. "Martians!"

Klotz gripped his helmet and said nothing.

The farmer brought us to his barn, where we

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# BOOK REVIEWS

would stay for the night. After the others arrived, we were served cooked eggs and boiled potatoes and soup with good chunks of meat, and finally a cup each of sugared milk from the cow that stood near us. By lantern light we slopped it up in minutes. I have never tasted a meal so good. The farmer returned and asked us if we wanted more, and to our great disappointment Fenzel sent him away. I wanted to kick his pimply face. Then our Kameradschaftsführer wiped yolk from his chin and made a brief announcement: "I have a message from the Führer!" He unfolded a sheet of paper and with a halting voice, as if reciting some required passage for school, he began to read a statement from the Führer himself, which guaranteed victory and promised that anyone who retreated would be shot. "I expect nothing less than heroism from all of you!" he added. "Earn the Iron Cross! Think how proud you will be to wear it on your chest! Now we will sleep, as we are getting up early to proceed to our position. I am staying outside because the hay is not good for my health. Anyone I hear talking will be stuck with a pitchfork. Koertig and Stalla, I have not forgotten about your near-desertion."

I had great trouble sleeping, for we had no blankets and my renewed worry about Fenzel's punishment spun around my eyes, especially now that the Führer's note promised execution of traitors. My arms twitched with each sound from the night. Trucks groaning, the train steaming. That distant thunder made the farmer's cow moan. Then I heard the strange birdcall again.

"Albrecht," I whispered. "Are you awake? What is that?"

"Yes," he answered after a while. There had been shuffling coming from his corner, so I sort of knew what he'd been doing. "Artillery."

"No, the other one. Like a bird."

"Maybe it's one of our super weapons."

"I think you're right," I said. This possibility left me calmer and, after burrowing into the hay, after convincing myself we had little reason to worry, I soon slipped into the granite of a boy's slumber.



ROBERT SHUSTER, who lives near New York City with his wife and four-year-old daughter, is a regular contributor to the *Village Voice* with the Best in Show column (reviews of visual arts). His short stories have appeared in *Witness*, *Mississippi Review*, and *Alaska Quarterly Review*, among other publications, and in the anthologies *Micro Fiction*, *Yellow Silk II*, and *Short Prose* for Critical Readers. He has also written about arts and culture for the *Los Angeles Times*, (Portland) *Oregonian*, *Threepenny Review*, and *Seattle Weekly*. For more information, visit [www.rshuster.com](http://www.rshuster.com).

## ARMY CATS

By Tom Sleigh

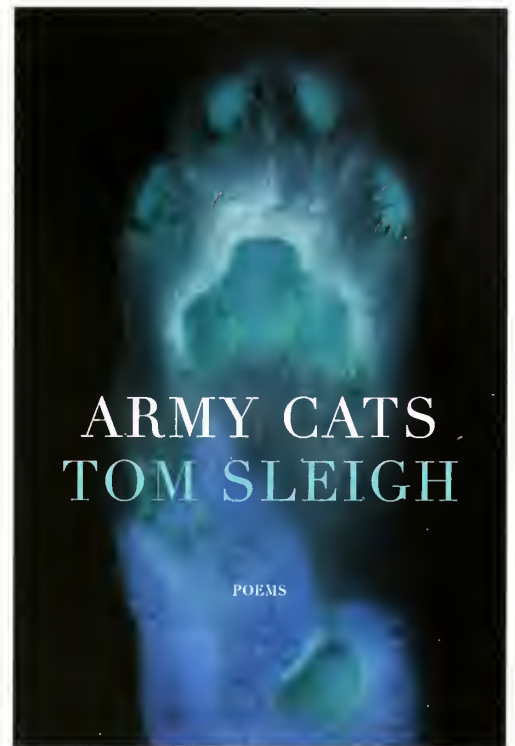
Graywolf Press, 2011

A BOOK REVIEW BY DAVID DANOFF

THERE ARE TWO common problems when a poet goes on a reporting trip and tries to make art from what he sees. The first has to do with the passage of time. News is what is *new*. We consume it on the spot, while it's fresh. But poetry takes time: time to write, time to find its way into print, and even longer before it's gathered in a book. And it usually aspires to a longer shelf life than something torn from the Reuters wire. Ezra Pound famously said that poetry is "news that stays news." It should actually get fresher as time passes, and its power should increase with greater distance from the reported events. That is, if it's done well.

In his new book of poems, his eighth collection, Tom Sleigh does it well indeed. The first section of the book contains poems that grew from a visit he made in the summer of 2007 to Lebanon. He had planned to report on the aftermath of the 2006 war with Israel, but a renewed outburst of civil conflict erupted while he was visiting. In addition to clashes between soldiers and militants, there were indiscriminate bombings and shootings of civilians. This must have been a hair-raising trip. But the impressive thing, when reading the poems, is to find how little the specifics of the conflict matter. The poems carry a greater charge—they seem almost to have become "newsier"—as more time passes and the fighting in Lebanon recedes from our memories, replaced by more recent eruptions in Egypt, Syria, Libya, or wherever might be next.

One of the ways Sleigh manages this is by viewing current events through the multiplying lenses of history, literature, and myth. Over this same Middle Eastern terrain, ancient history always hovers, with its pageant of empires, gods, and bloodshed. And then, when we step back a little, following the implications of the violence in Lebanon as it echoes through poems set in New York and elsewhere, the same history continues to haunt us. It's inescapable; everything is shadowed, multiplied, linked. Classical allusions, as well as more recent ones, sprinkle the text. Saddam Hussein, in the moment of his death, is conflated with a troupe of Shakespearean villains. The corpse of a beautiful young man seems "straight out of Cavafy." The marshes of Lebanon bleed into the oily waters glimpsed from the window of a train approaching Newark, New Jersey, and this is also the mud where a doomed Midwestern pig wallows, and also the muddy pit at Ground Zero, and also the mud into which bricks are laid by slave labor at Auschwitz to raise a factory tower (as described by Primo Levi). This oily mud is a recurrent image throughout the book, and it comes to take on primal significance.



The title poem, "Army Cats," establishes another archetypal scene, although it's one composed of somewhat less familiar ingredients:

Cats in the tanks' squat shadows lounging.  
Or sleeping curled up under gun turrets.  
Hundreds of them sniffing or licking  
long hind legs stuck into the air,

great six-toed brutes fixing you with a feral,  
slit-eyed stare

These cats blithely luxuriating among engines of violence are linked with a scene of orgiastic ancient cat worship, and then (abruptly) with a detail drawn from an account of the ancient Persians going to war against Egypt with cats nailed to their shields, as a way of psychologically disarming the Egyptian archers. A point, it would seem, is being made about pleasure and violence, victor and victim, strength and vulnerability. But beyond that, an unexpected conjunction of images and ideas is being forged, and the mere fact of where in the world these tanks are patrolling doesn't matter. (Well, it may help that it isn't far from Egypt.) The strange, unforgettable amalgam—the subtle blend of tones, the surprising leaps, and the nuanced vision of history and nature and their uneasy interplay—is the news in this poem, and it doesn't get stale.

Another way in which Sleigh manages to ensure his poems' continued relevance is simply by writing well. The language is vivid and sharply observed, as for example in "Hunter Gatherer":



snow falling on the roof falls like it used to do  
when freeze and thaw hardened to a satin-sheen  
and nothing moved in the offing but the  
lighthouse beam.

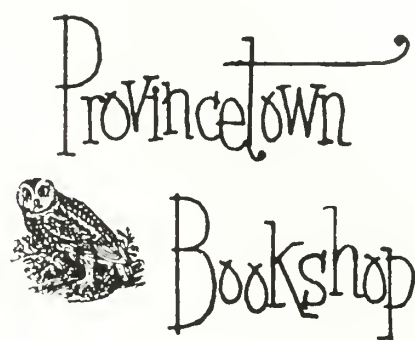
And so this morning is the morning of the heart  
in which the vodka, talking shit all night,  
dissolves into pure sunlight, purer thought

The style is generally straightforward, folksy,  
plain, although Sleigh is not afraid to uncork the  
big words and ornate manner when the occasion  
demands it. For instance, in a section subtitled  
“After Signorelli’s *Last Judgment*,” from a longer  
sequence, “The Games,” about two warring intel-  
lectual foes, now both deceased:

If, as he painted it, eyes stare up out of the  
underlife  
and ghostly forms shed floods of emptiness  
until as flesh emergent they push themselves  
head first through the earth of their own graves,

springing out skin and bone to walk on  
heaven’s soil,  
then what could I say to make these cattails  
and marshgrass blowing all one way  
fecund as the shiftings in this generating clay

so you too could lift yourselves up out of mud,  
muscular torsos and clear eyes going lighter at  
the sight  
of your own naked sexes flushed with blood.



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Sleigh is also, as shown by the previously quoted passages, adept at using traditional poetic structures such as quatrains and tercets, along with loosely patterned rhyme schemes and a measure that flirts with an elegantly crisp pentameter, to give his poems formal shape. He takes a palpable delight in the sound of the language, and in poem after poem the shrewd deployment of rhyme at a point of climax or cadence helps, as W. B. Yeats put it, to make the poem “click shut like a box.” The events depicted in these poems are fused into something new (even permanently new), and definitely more memorable, by Sleigh’s poetic technique.

The other likely pitfall for a poet-reporter is what might be called the matter of rights. Put bluntly: as essentially a tourist, what right does an American poet have to extract aesthetic value from the suffering of the Lebanese? Sleigh tackles this idea head-on in what emerge as some of the book’s most interesting and affecting poems.

In “Spell,” for instance, he describes an encounter with the body of a beautiful young man who has been killed by a bomb. What is the speaker’s role, as an observer and outsider? Does he have the right to get involved, to feel personally connected? Does he have the right even to feel? Isn’t that a kind of presumption, a way of intruding on somebody else’s grief?

I felt myself at the edge of the big story:  
there was something so soft about his body  
as he lay there, open to all comers,  
stalled forever in the climax of his pleasure.  
I had no rights in him at all, and yet there I was  
in my words’ oily sheen, ready to cover  
him over, lave him . . .

The poem, for all its beauty and intensity, ends with: “Yellow caution tape declaiming in Arabic / and English / STAY BACK.” It is as though, having brought the image of the young man home to us, having shown us what has happened, having captured it in high-definition verse and preserved it as perennially new (while also ancient), the poet is still a little wary—maybe even slightly guilty—about what he’s done. And this makes the poem feel all the more authentic and truthful.

The book’s second and third sections leave Lebanon behind and mostly withdraw from current events. The poems in these sections pull back instead to the private experience of suffering, physical decline, and death, and the various ways one might try to overcome the body’s frailty: via art, music, sex, football, beauty. If I’ve spent more time on the first section’s war poems, it’s because the later pages do feel slightly pale by comparison. These poems are no less well-wrought, and many of the same strategies are at work. But whereas eliding specifics about the Lebanon conflict seemed like a shrewd way to achieve wider relevance, in some of the later poems this same tactic feels like it’s sapping them of strength. In the absence of context, and with only a faint sense of a strong personal “I” inhabiting their movements, some of these poems about family, for instance, or lovers or lost friends, feel curiously generalized. The reader feels held at a distance. In addition, the strangeness of a foreign

location helped the war poems achieve more unexpected turns and unfamiliar combinations. By comparison, in the poems set back at home there are fewer surprises.

That doesn’t mean there aren’t things to see. One poem that makes a strong impression in spite of what might seem like an extremely depersonalized conceit (or is it actually because of that conceit?) is entitled “For a Spacesuit Set Adrift.” In 2006, as a note explains, an unusual mission was undertaken by the Russian space agency on behalf of a consortium of schools and amateur radio societies. Basically, an empty space suit was pushed out of the International Space Station, with a radio transmitter, batteries, and some other equipment aboard. While “SuitSat” was intended to orbit the Earth for several days, “exciting ham radio operators and touching the world” (in the words of its promotional materials), it apparently ceased transmitting within just a few hours. The batteries likely gave out. Presumably not many students or ham radio operators ever got the chance to make contact, although there were reports of a few weak, stray signals detected for up to two weeks.

Sleigh takes this rather odd situation and writes a poem from the perspective of the suit:

Marooned where nobody can reach her,  
her abandonment expanding like the decimals  
of pi,  
she senses the dead approaching, here, here—  
the dead that the ones down there

glued to their antennae so desire and fear.  
They shove her out the airlock, they shove her  
out again,  
again the void fills her suit the way it fills the  
dark she floats in.

The effect is eerie and surprisingly moving. The empty suit becomes a vessel for anyone’s feelings of isolation, loss, rejection, despair, and the physical absolutes of space take on psychological and metaphysical implications.

She’s back before the big bang,  
before anyone can laugh at her,  
before her body can abandon her

and love drifts away.

This is an example of what Sleigh’s poetry does at its best. The event is both particular and universal, a piece of news trivia but also an emblem of something larger. “SuitSat” may have survived for only a few hours in 2006, but here we are years later, and the poem is bursting into startling life on the page. ▲

DAVID DANOFF is a writer and editor living near Washington, DC. He received his MFA from the University of Maryland, and his poems and reviews have appeared in *Measure*, *Tikkun*, and several other publications.



## TRAIN DREAMS

By Denis Johnson

*Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011*

A BOOK REVIEW BY AMANDA COPLIN

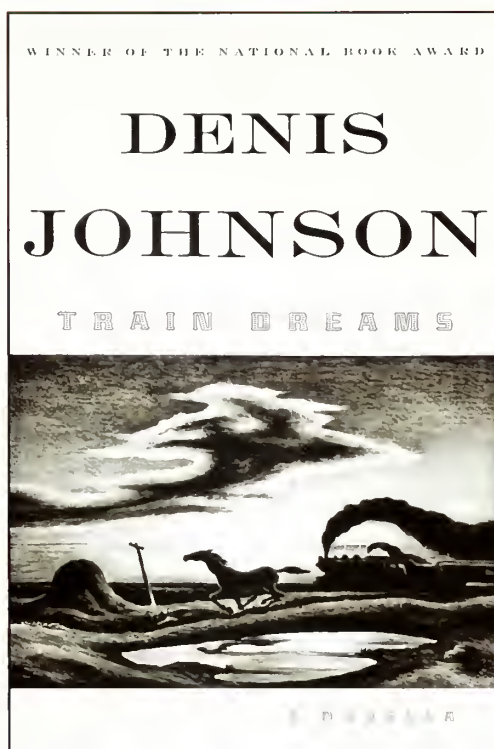
IT SEEMS THE largest challenge facing any biographer—or fiction writer, for that matter, seeking to write about a character's life in its entirety—is to decide which events and details of the person's life to include. How do you express the most defining moments of a person's life?

Denis Johnson's newest novel, *Train Dreams*, tells the life story of a man named Robert Grainier, a logger and itinerant worker living on the Idaho Panhandle in the early twentieth century. The novel is less a conventional narrative than a collection, to borrow a term from Virginia Woolf, of Grainier's *moments of being*—those moments in a person's life that rise above all others in visionary importance. These moments, drawn out by encounters with other characters, and the landscape, constitute the true portrait of Grainier's life. The meaning of a life, as presented by Johnson, is an expression of its echoing—or rhyming, corresponding—experiences. Johnson succeeds in presenting one life—its fullness, its depth, its particular pitch—in just over one hundred pages.

If Grainier's life has a characterizing tone, it is that of sorrow. Born of questionable parents and place (literally questionable—he does not know from whom, or where, he sprung), Grainier was delivered by train to the town of Fry, Idaho, in 1893, to live with his aunt and uncle and cousins. There he grows, and as a man in his early thirties meets Gladys, who becomes his wife. The novel tracks his life after he loses his wife and baby daughter, Kate, in a fire that ravages the valley in which they live.

The actual time Grainier experiences with his family is short—maybe two years—but he spends his entire life afterward in varied degrees of mourning. The relationships he forms with other people, even if they are brief encounters, reflect this grief. These characters, immediately and on one hand, are wickedly entertaining. In the vein of all Denis Johnson characters, they are also by turns funny, tender, and terrible. Ultimately, they reveal their depth and purpose; they form a close ring around Robert Grainier and illuminate him.

In one scene, years after Grainier loses Gladys and Kate in the fire, he witnesses the death of a teenage boy. The boy, who moments before had been helping Grainier unload sacks of cornmeal from a wagon, simply sits down, leans over, and dies. The boy's grandmother is called from the house to verify the boy's death. "Still in his youth. Still in his youth!" the grandmother cries, and goes off to stand alone by the roadside. The boy's grandfather asks Grainier to drive the body to the mortician's, as "his wife waited in the yard under a wild mixture of clouds and sunshine, looking amazed and, from this distance, as young as a child, and also very beautiful, it seemed to Grainier." This is a harmonizing image of Grainier's own grief, his own shock at his family's passing. The dead boy is his own child, the woman in the distance



looking "very young and beautiful" is his own wife. The book is full of moments like these—not overly drawn, but just right, and deeply resonant.

It is not a coincidence, also, that we see the mourning woman ensconced in a "wild mixture of clouds and sunshine." Descriptions of weather and landscape are rampant in this novel, and act as a sort of lubricant for memory, and a touchstone for deep emotional experience. The first truly arresting description of landscape in the novel is when Grainier is courting Gladys; he takes her up into the Moyea Valley to show her the land he hopes to build on:

They'd borrowed a wagon from Gladys's father and brought a picnic in two baskets. They hiked over to Grossling's meadow and waded into it through daisies up to their knees. They put out a blanket beside a seasonal creek trickling over the grass and lay back together. Grainier considered the pasture a beautiful place. Somebody should paint it, he said to Gladys. The buttercups nodded in the breeze and the petals of the daisies trembled. Yet farther off, across the field, they seemed stationary.

The natural world is analogous to their love. Johnson writes beautifully here. The sweetness of the scene is cut, however, by the clumsy human actions and words—Grainier kisses her too hard; she instructs him how to do it right. He proposes marriage; she accepts. The next time we see the verb *wade* ("waded through daisies up to their knees") is in a sharply contrasting scene, when Grainier is wading through ash to get to his home in the Moyea Valley, after the fire:

The farther north he hiked, the louder came the reports of cracking logs and the hiss of burning, until every charred tree around him still gave off smoke. He rounded a bend to hear the roar of the

conflagration and see the fire a half mile ahead like a black-and-red curtain dropped from a night sky. Even from this distance the heat of it stopped him. He collapsed to his knees, sat in the warm ashes through which he'd been wading, and wept.

The natural world, and natural forces, take things away, but are also able to uniquely comfort. Late in the book, there is a passage that begins as amusing and then transforms into something uncanny, and moving. It is summer, and it has not rained in many months; the air is heavy, turgid. Robert Grainier is suffering from a bout of lust that will not let him alone. He sleeps outdoors, on a pallet on the grass, but finds no relief from the heat nor the terrible desire. He has anticipated going to a randy sideshow that is passing through town; but the day arrives, and he is too overwhelmed to go, embarrassed, finally, petrified by his feelings. Instead of attending the sideshow, he goes on a walk, to calm himself:

At sunset, all progress stopped. He was standing on a cliff. He'd found a back way into a kind of arena enclosing a body of water called Spruce Lake, and now he looked down on it hundreds of feet below him, its flat surface as still and black as obsidian, engulfed in the shadow of surrounding cliffs, ringed with a double ring of evergreens and reflected evergreens. Beyond, he saw the Canadian Rockies still sunlit, snow-peaked, a hundred miles away, as if the earth were in the midst of its creation, the mountains taking their substance out of the clouds. He'd never seen so grand a prospect. . . . The curse had left him, and the contagion of his lust had drifted off and settled into one of those distant valleys.

Any major emotion, Johnson is saying—joy, grief, even lust—finds a resting place in the natural world. So that even in the direst of circumstances we find relief, a way to survive.

Johnson is adept at presenting Grainier's life through his experiences with other characters and the natural world, but his true gift is in how he imparts overall meaning to Grainier's life as a whole, choosing which moments to include and arranging them. Two scenes work particularly well to reflect this meaning. In one, the opening scene of the novel, we see Grainier as part of a group of men who capture a Chinese man—he is accused of stealing—and carry him to a site of a bridge under construction, with the intent to throw him over the ledge to his death. This scene, it should be noted, stands apart from all others for its particular violence:

The party of executioners got to the midst of the last completed span, sixty feet above the rapids, and made every effort to toss the Chinaman over. But he bested them by clinging to their arms and legs, weeping his gibberish, until suddenly he let go and grabbed the beam beneath him with one hand. He kicked free of his captors easily, as they were trying to shed themselves of him anyway, and went over the side, dangling over the gorge and making hand-over-hand out over the river on the skeleton form of the next span. . . . The



...man dropped from beam to beam like a... artist downward along the crosshatch... structure. ... Mr. Sears removed from the hol-... on his belt a large old four-shot black-powder revolver and took his four, to no effect. By then the Chinaman had vanished.

The second scene occurs at the climax of the novel. Up until this point, all of Grainier's moments of being—the majority of events in the novel—take place in what could be called the real world, the world of sensory experience. This moment, however, strays from this rule. The expression occurs at the culmination (or perhaps *as* the culmination) of Robert Grainier's sorrow. A pack of wolves rushes through Grainier's property at night, and one remains in his yard: an injured wolf, a wolf-girl it turns out, whom Grainier has heard rumors about. A phantom who roams the countryside at night, poisoning the natures of domesticated animals and terrifying humans:

Grainier turned convulsively and went to the table looking for—he didn't know. He'd never kept a shot-gun. Perhaps a piece of kindling to beat at the thing's head. He fumbled at the clutter on the table and located the matches and lit a hurricane lamp and found such a weapon, and then went out again in his long johns, barefoot, lifting the lantern high and holding his club before him, stalked and made nervous by his own monstrous shadow, so huge it filled the whole clearing behind him. ... The whole valley seemed to reflect his shock. He heard only his footsteps and the wolf-girl's panting complaint.


Though the wolf-girl snaps at him, he carries her inside the cabin and dresses her wounds. He thinks the wolf-girl is his daughter, Kate, come to visit him. He questions her, but she does not, or cannot, answer him. He wakes just before dawn and witnesses her jumping out the window. When she disappears into the woods, he does not follow her.

These two scenes—the opening scene with the Chinese man, and the wolf-girl fantasy—are a perfect example of what the writer Charles Baxter calls “rhyming action”: moments, images, actions, that are similar, but not in obvious ways, in a work of art. The scenes rhyme, but weirdly. Both scenes

focus on an *other* that, to Robert Grainier, is animalized. The wolf-girl, obviously so; the Chinese man “shipped and twisted like a weasel in a sack”; he has a “horny foot”; he “dances up out of the creek like a spider.” Also, he is called a “little demon” and is described as “speaking in tongues.” The outrageous point is that Grainier recognizes the humanity—his own daughter—in the wolf-girl, whereas the Chinese man—obviously human to the reader—remains alien to Grainier. The Chinese man escapes, swings away on the bridge skeleton, becomes smaller with distance; and the wolf-girl, who twists within Grainier's grasp like the Chinese man trying to escape, bounds into the wilderness: both elude Grainier.

These two important figures are animalized for a reason. Animals are associated with the natural world, which in the novel is mysterious, mystical; the rule of the natural world is held in the highest esteem by Grainier. The wolf-girl and the Chinese man (again, not as a human, but as a symbol) have one foot in this world, and one in the next. The scene with the Chinese man, though it appears first in the novel, echoes, or foreshadows, this later scene. The heart of the novel is the scene with the wolf-girl: here we feel Grainier's overwhelming loneliness, sorrow, and confusion. When reading the scene—a fantasy presented as reality—the reader

feels elated at the possibility that *this might actually be happening*. It is a kind of breathlessness, as one feels when caught in a moment of violence, like the scene with the mob and the Chinese man. That Johnson organized the novel this way—opening it with a scene of uncharacteristic violence, and including as the novel's climax what is most likely a waking dream of the protagonist—is a brilliant stroke, as it keeps the book from being a mere litany of the events of one man's life. Such organization creates meaning all on its own. Grainier has so often seen what he has coveted most flee from him, and so Johnson has created this unique signature—this organization—to reflect that. These two scenes finally work to convey deeper meaning; they rise over the rest of the novel to form a bridge.

*Train Dreams* is an artful and moving portrait of a man's life. Reading it, one wonders: What events would be included in my own life story? What would stand out, and what would fall away? Which moments would a master storyteller, such as Denis Johnson, draw together to create ultimate meaning? 

AMANDA COPLIN is the author of *The Orchardist*, a novel set in Washington State at the turn of the twentieth century. A Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in 2008–09, she currently resides in Portland, Oregon.

## THEY HOVER OVER US

By Richard Fellingner

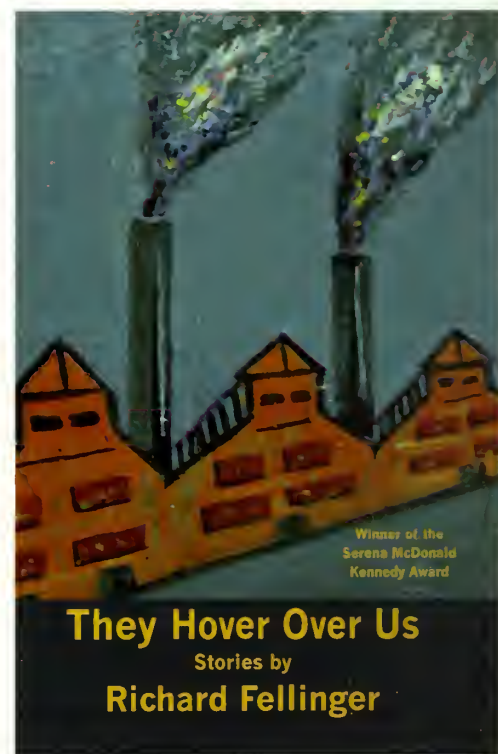
Snake Nation Press, 2012

A BOOK REVIEW BY TAYLOR M. POLITES

RICHARD FELLINGER'S award-winning debut short-story collection explores the lives of the left-behind in rust-belt Pennsylvania. *They Hover Over Us* offers thirteen exquisitely sculpted stories, each of which illuminates a moment with glaring, lightning-flash clarity. The stories are precise and spare, yet they reveal a powerful truth about choice, responsibility, and denial. His characters struggle with addiction, desire, love, fear, guilt, and shame—and, it seems most of all, with how they make choices and how they live with them. Fellingner achieves a rare and delicate balance here, creating voices that echo long after you have put the book down.

I still hear Miss Rhoades, a young schoolteacher, during her parent-teacher conferences, burdened with anxiety over an unexpected pregnancy and wondering whether or not her boyfriend, lacking in maturity himself, will be responsible for the child. Does she even want him to?

Miss Rhoades folded her hands on the desk and waited for a response. She'd seen the looks, both of them, and she wondered: How does this happen? How do two people get to a place like this? Get married, have a baby, and before long you're fed up, split up and firing dirty looks at each other across a desk in front of your kid's teacher. And so soon—they barely looked older than her.



I see Murph and his ex-wife, Paula, who appear in two stories, exercising their resentments through their son, Derek. Paula, remarried, has a family with her new husband. Murph is inarticulate, impotent, and seething with resentment, incapable of pushing through his own feelings of alienation to reach his son, though he tries. Is he trying for his son? Or himself? Or to compete with Paula's new husband?

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Murph looked around the floor for Derek's socks and spikes. He found them in the corner, then knelt beside the gurney and wrestled them onto Derek's feet. When it came time to tie the laces, he paused and wondered if he should bother with double knots. He didn't see much point to it, but made double knots anyway. First the left, then the right, pulling them each as tight as he could, and holding onto the right lace until he felt the stare from Derek's mom telling him to let go.

Fellinger achieves a voyeuristic fascination with Andy, a newspaper publisher who hires an attractive editor with an unsavory personal history. There are surprises here, not the least of which are the repercussions of Andy's obsessive stalking.

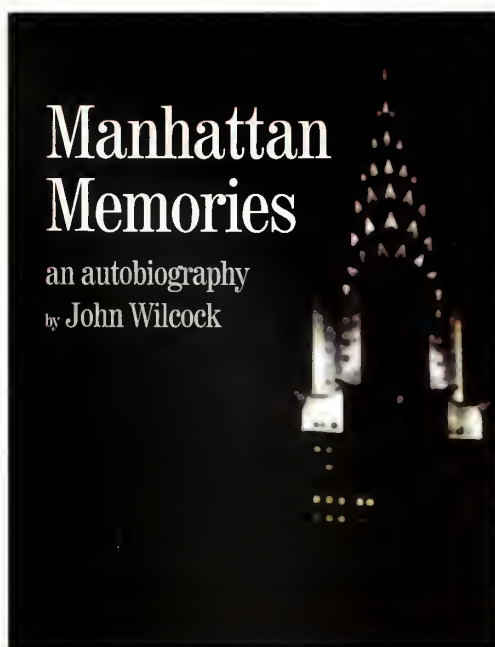
He felt like he was standing back on his porch watching his life unfold with woeful foresight. He knew Erica would take this seriously, and his job would be threatened, and lawyers would get involved, and his wife would find out, and she would take it seriously, too. He knew it was his turn.

Fellinger invokes the abandoned mills that shadow his characters—an apt comparison. The mills harken to a better past that still reverberates in the lives of these people, like a goading reminder of their more limited opportunities. Even the ones who “get out” cannot escape it. These people are haunted, by past decisions and new ones. To have the baby or not. To get in the fight or not. To take another drink or to hurl the bottle away. To make another bad choice, with the fatalistic knowledge of the badness of the choice, or to turn around and walk away. Some rise above it, taking responsibility for themselves and others. Some don't. And in that choice lies an excruciating poignancy that is completely free of sentimentality:

We live in Johnstown, an old steel city surrounded by miles of mills, mostly empty. They're charcoal-brown buildings in tight rows at the edge of downtown, and sometimes it feels like they hover over us, like ghosts that haunt us daily. The chamber of commerce types are always blathering about a New Johnstown, but it never seems much different from the old. Still, I don't mind it here. I've heard some people say that every day here is like winter, but it's my hometown, so I'm probably used to it.

Fellinger has proven himself to be a gifted and dedicated artist. Before this collection won the 2011 Serena McDonald Kennedy Fiction Award, these stories appeared in twelve different literary journals. That level of discipline and professionalism are certain to produce more elegant and insightful stories in the future. ★

TAYLOR M. POLITES lives in Providence, Rhode Island, with his small Chihuahua, Clovis. His first novel, *The Rebel Wife*, was published in February 2012 by Simon & Schuster. He received an MFA in Creative Writing from Wilkes University.



## MANHATTAN MEMORIES: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By John Wilcock  
*Lulu.com, 2010*

A BOOK REVIEW BY MARSHALL BROOKS

IF JOHN WILCOCK had lived in the Garden of Eden he would have started the world's first underground newspaper there. One can easily picture it: a paradisiacal incarnation of John's 1960s legendary tabloid, *Other Scenes*, featuring a lively threesome on its cover and an interview inside with the snake, who, it turns out, really dug (in the argot of the day) cool, mellow people. An *Eden on \$5 a Day* guide would have been sure to follow, precursor to the dozens of travel books that John Wilcock actually has methodically researched and authored over the years, beginning with *Mexico on \$5 a Day* in 1960 for enterprising guidebook publisher Arthur Frommer. Still traveling the world at age eighty-four, no moss grows on John Wilcock, which *Manhattan Memories* makes clear. But there is more.

The encapsulated prose of *Manhattan Memories* relates not only to John's cofounding of the *Village Voice* in 1955 and his ten years there as columnist

promulgating the offbeat, but also to his active stints at the *New York Times*, the *East Village Other* (New York's first underground paper), and the *Los Angeles Free Press* as well. Add to this the founding of his own free-form counterculture roost in 1968, *Other Scenes*, and cofounding *Interview* magazine with Andy Warhol in 1969. The genuine charm of *Manhattan Memories*, though, is the book's companionable modesty. It only grows in proportion to John Wilcock's many life accomplishments, countercultural exploits, and globally rich friendships.

Before reading *Manhattan Memories*, I never thought of Andy Warhol as a teacher. But at John Wilcock's insistence, one at least entertains the idea. John, a frequenter of Warhol's Factory for many years, found himself charm-struck by the artist's laconic aura. He shares, credo-like, the two most important lessons that he learned from the artist: "To seize the moment and turn every event into an opportunity" and "To listen to every idea without bias and act upon the best." The savor of John's memoir owes much to the humble-sounding yet radical practicality of these two lessons. (For Warholics, John's recently reissued, lavishly illustrated, *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol* is a must have, by the way.)

The richest moments in *Manhattan Memories*, in the end, are its behind-the-scenes thumbnail portraits of places and people—most of them hardly superstars or household names, and all the more affecting for this. Jim Haynes, "who helped to start London's *International Times* before making his Paris atelier a gathering place for virtually everybody," immediately comes to mind here. (See jim-haynes.com to RSVP Jim your own standing invitation to Sunday dinner.) John once conceived of doing a tabloid, to be called *Collage*, devoted exclusively to the "backstage" of everything, but his autobiography—and one might even say his life—handily accomplishes as much. ★

Work by MARSHALL BROOKS has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, and *American Book Review*. His collection *Paperback Island: Street Bibliography Essays* is due out in 2012. He lives in West Dover, Vermont, with his wife and two sons and is the proprietor of *Arts End Books*, a literary arts press. *Manhattan Memories* can be ordered through John Wilcock's website: [www.ojaiorange.com](http://www.ojaiorange.com).

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## THE REBEL WIFE

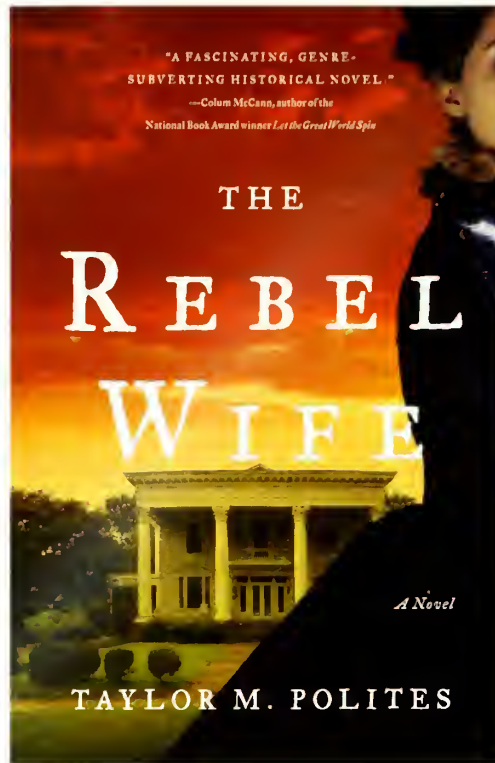
By Taylor M. Polites

Simon & Schuster, 2012

A BOOK REVIEW BY ANNE SANOW

IT IS A FICTION WRITER'S prerogative to inhabit the mind of any character—indeed, a responsibility—and always a challenge to give true voice to a character who is far removed from one's own experience and time. And when writing about certain historical periods, such as the American Civil War, the thoughts and deeds of those characters come with hotly contested expectations. Taylor Polites's debut novel, *The Rebel Wife*, takes up this challenge with the first-person narration of a Reconstruction-era belle, and upends some fixed notions of Southern characters and myths along the way.

The opening sentence is a surprise in its immediacy: "I know that Eli is dying," we are told by Augustus Branson, as she describes her much-older husband, who is in the delirious throes of a sudden fever that is seen as a terrible omen by her servants, who are former slaves. And the scene is a horrifying one: "This red—red everywhere, smeared on everything" is the blood seeping from his pores. "The redness drips from his temples like sweat," she tells us as she watches the servants wipe him down. "The bed linens are soaked with jagged marks of red saturation around his body like a grisly halo."



We're with Augustus (or Gus, as she is known) during the turmoil of the fever; at her side while the town doctor professes utter confusion at the illness before him; with her as Eli dies trying to tell her something she doesn't understand, and leaves her, at the end of the first chapter, a young widow.

It quickly becomes evident that she has been left in a world whose traditions have done her a disservice. The ten years following the end of the war have stratified Gus's Alabama town of Albion in ways that have driven anything resembling straightforwardness underground. The men from old Southern families speak of honor while doing everything they can to regain control of a lost world; Judge Heppert, a distant relative who is the trustee of Eli's estate, exercises this control over Gus by withholding details of her financial situation, which looks to be precarious in the light of Eli's bad business dealings, clandestine political activity, and involvement with the Freedmen's Bureau. The Southern society women, meanwhile, uphold tradition with their own method of social control. In a scene where the society women call on the formerly ostracized Gus, the "gushing sympathies" that soon give way to viperish barbs rival anything India Wilkes ever spat to Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*.

Gus has been cosseted in this world—and now she begins to realize just how constricted she has been, at a time when she may be in danger. Simon, a former slave long loyal to Eli, is searching for a missing saddlebag full of money he was to use on an errand for Eli's political causes. Judge Heppert and his indolent son Buck seem to be very interested in locating certain things left behind by Eli as well, and Gus's brother Mike, a broken-down and mean-spirited drunk, tries to exert his own control over his sister. Panicked rumors of the spreading blood fever are rampant in the town and its environs. Even in her own home, Gus feels the press of secrets and lies, not knowing if she can trust her longtime

servant Emma (who has been with her since a girl, even after being freed) and the headstrong Rachel, who is striving for a measure of independence and dares, as a black woman, to dream of a better future.

What makes all of this work brilliantly—and often breathtakingly—is that we are able for once to experience this postwar Southern story not from the outside or on high, but from *within*. It's no mean feat to forget about the author completely when reading a first-person narration; it requires a technical skill on the part of the writer that must remain invisible to readers, while actually manipulating them a great deal. In this novel Polites allows his own authorial presence to melt away in favor of the interiority of Gus's voice, which is utterly believable.

This believability also leads to some very particular frustrations as we follow her character. Not only has she been sheltered (benignly or otherwise) from the realities of money, politics, and more—Gus doesn't even know how to begin to cope. We watch her fall back on feminine wiles as the Judge informs her of the problems with Eli's estate, responding meekly that "it all seems very proper." She reflexively rebukes Simon when he seems to be taking an overly familiar tone with her.

But as the web of secrets and lies around her tightens, Gus begins to assert herself. She first speaks up at Eli's funeral, when she contradicts the Judge by permitting the former slaves of the town to pay their respects. She begins to ask questions, and forms an alliance with Simon. Yet she also retreats into dosing herself with laudanum when her newfound knowledge becomes too much to bear: "The laudanum takes effect so slowly," she tells us after discovering an especially excruciating secret about her past. "Not like it used to. That's what they say. The more you take, the more you need. . . . I've heard of women who have taken too much and slowly fade away, cold as stone by morning." Polites has given us no easy heroine here, one as likely to stifle her own progress as those who would manipulate her.

And this is, of course, the point: Gus is not a modern woman, and if she seems sometimes to be in denial, we understand why by being in the moment with her, in her world, as she begins to see what the possibilities might be—for her as well as for Simon, Emma, and Rachel. The shift in Gus's relationships with the former slaves is one of the most compelling parts of the narrative, and there is a real pleasure in watching her comprehend how their roles in this wasted society might eventually change.

Another pleasure of historical fiction is period detail, and in *The Rebel Wife* this comes alive on the sensory level. Polites clearly knows the objects and rituals of the old South, with wonderful descriptions of pattern books, memento mori, and *Godey's Lady's Book* kept in trunks and baskets. But again, it's the in-the-moment experience with Gus that brings her world to life, such as when she finds these keepsakes in her attic in the summer heat: "Sweat trickles behind my ears onto my neck, soaking the collar of my dress. I unbutton my cuffs and roll up the sleeves. Heat comes off my wrists. I open the top buttons of my bodice and take a handkerchief from my pocket, soaking up the perspiration

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as it runs off of me.” In no better way could the reader truly understand the oppression of women in Reconstruction-era Alabama than to feel as tightly corseted as one.

It seems clear that Polites has a larger historical canvas in mind—but he knows that the wisest

course in rendering it is to avoid lecturing, keeping the focus tight on character instead. There’s exposition when we need it, but it never exceeds what we would expect Gus to know. This makes this rebel wife’s experience, and her shame at accepting the strictures of her world “as the way they should be,”

all the more poignant, and her steps toward freedom resonate the more. **X**

ANNE SANOW is the author of the story collection *Triple Time*. She is a former writing Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

## (T)RAVEL/UN(T)RAVEL: POEMS

By Neil Shepard

Mid-List Press, 2011

A BOOK REVIEW BY KEVIN ODERMAN

The book begins:

You’ve met them, travelers half-  
returned from afar, curled on a couch,  
comfortable,

uncomfortable, worrying gifts from  
elsewhere—

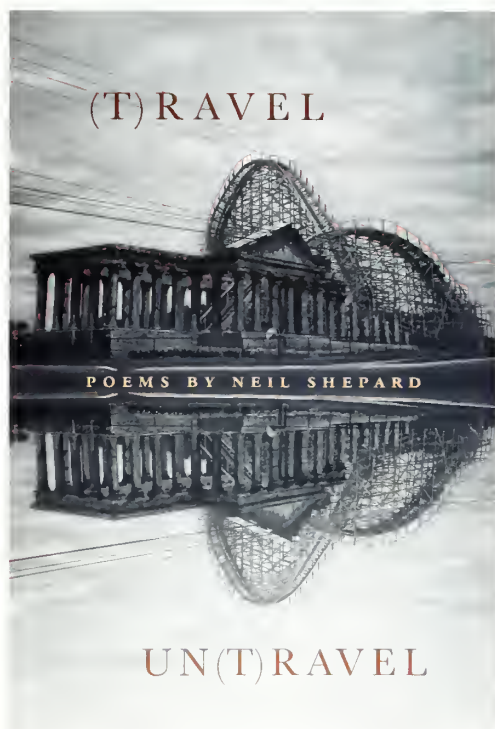
You’ve met them, you’ve probably been them. Travel—it used to be a prerogative of the rich, globe-trotters, but now that’s you and me, traveling, we’re all of us traveling. We’ve gone, come back, and gone again. What’s that about, really? What are we doing out there?

Neil Shepard, in his most recent book of poems, *(T)ravel/Un(t)ravel*, takes up the question, not to answer it—it’s not a question that admits of a satisfactory answer—but for the illuminations it provides. The poems in *(T)ravel/Un(t)ravel* are shot through with such illuminations, bright, if transient, flares that light up Shepard’s travels and the reader’s as well, because the experience of travel is, in the best Whitmanian sense, common. We are all one traveler on the road, away from home, understanding in fragments at best the world we’re passing through.

The book opens, in the poem I quoted above, after travel, the traveler returned home and uneasy, because only *half-returned*. And that’s as returned as a serious traveler gets; displaced abroad, the traveler will be forever displaced at home. Perhaps the traveler knows this setting out, that the cultural shock outward bound costs us far less than the culture shock of return. Shepard knows. Indeed, his title, *(T)ravel/Un(t)ravel*, suggests the polarity, that we are made and unmade on the road. Becoming, at once, fit and unfit.

Although unraveling haunts this book, the poems themselves are extremely well made, strong with an American idiom sometimes delicate and sometimes brute. Sometimes ironic, funny, irreverent, and earnest. Erotic. Scatological and mythological. What can’t this guy do? And so, in Shanghai,

Sometimes, when the smell of thousand-year-old  
eggs and rotting duck overcame us, or  
sometimes,  
when Shanghai slang and formal Han muddled  
our heads, we’d retreat to the foreigner’s  
compound



to soak in the cadences of English, retreat  
further  
to the bedroom—but the smells would follow  
us in—  
hot pepper oil and sizzling garlic mixing  
with the salt odor of sex and the sweet honey  
on our legs that dried and clung like a second  
skin.

In Shepard’s poems you don’t “have to have been there,” you’re going, falling into other worlds.

To get a sense of the range of poems in this book, it’s instructive to compare Shepard’s take on the sensuously dense world of Shanghai to something near sensory deprivation on a hike in North Wales, on Mount Snowdon, in a whiteout of mist and clouds:

one must . . .  
believe  
something up there exists  
as certain as the end of earth  
at Snowdon’s summit and the  
plunge into space, if one wanders  
beyond what is sensibly revealed—  
if not palpable as an object,  
then a piercing sound from a high  
invisible place, not quite object,  
not void, not song, not human  
word, but human made, for certain,  
and recorded in the human mind.

This poem bears the dedication for Wallace Stevens, and perhaps it wouldn’t have been hard to guess. In a bow to the book’s tutelary spirits, the first poem in each section is dedicated to an illustrious forbear, William Carlos Williams, Whitman, Jeffers, Poe, and Emerson, in addition to Stevens. But this list does not begin to suggest the depth of Shepard’s easy familiarity with poetry in English. He goes all the way back. And so, to honor beginnings, on a poet’s pilgrimage, he visited Whitby Abbey, where Caedmon, the first poet to write in English, fashioned poems in the vernacular, the people’s tongue,

to raise up vulgarity  
and show its native beauty . . .  
[so that] the rough speech of the fields  
was at last converted to singing.

But for all the real learning that informs this book, Shepard’s poems never read like a test; he always suggests what we need to know, so the poems feel welcoming, the horizon wide where the road crosses over into the next valley.

I have perhaps exaggerated Shepard’s role as a representative traveler. Although we all have a share in the experience of travel, Shepard, married to linguistic anthropologist Kate Riley, has on occasion gone farther out and further in than even the serious traveler. After a year in French Polynesia, Shepard’s mind began to take on the colors of the Marquesan hunter-gatherers who instructed him in their ways:

Lately, as I gather the fallen  
guava, grapefruit, tangerine,

I imagine meat beneath a chicken’s wing.  
And lately, as I climb toward the high

limbs of orange, mango, corasol,  
I see a spear through the under-

belly of a fairy tern. How easy  
to pluck it from this in-

carnation to bloom on a dinner plate.

No, most of us haven’t traveled quite this far, but these lines make me very glad that Shepard has.

The poems collected in *(T)ravel/Un(t)ravel* are Neil Shepard’s *gifts from elsewhere*. And they are for us, travelers, readers of poetry, for those of us ready to open the book. **X**

KEVIN ODERMAN is a Professor of English at West Virginia University. An essayist, he also writes expat fiction. His next novel, *White Vespa*, set on the Greek island of Symi, is due out from Etruscan Press late this year.



## LATE RAPTUREOUS

By Frank X. Gaspar

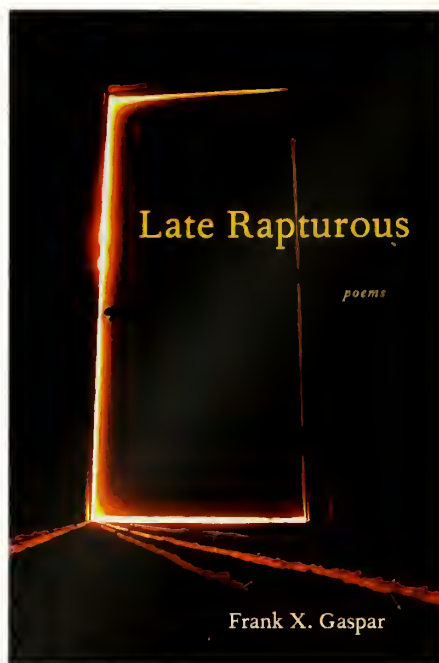
Autumn House Press, 2012

A BOOK REVIEW BY CARLO MATOS

FRANK X. GASPAR'S fifth book of poems, *Late Rapturous*, is liberally peopled with gods, demons, angels, Old Testament prophets, and saints from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. It is also full to the brim with painters and poets. Vermeer and de Kooning take center stage for the painters, while Milton, Yeats, Rimbaud, and Crane represent the poets. It is a book fully concerned with its own composition, as we are constantly reminded in nearly every poem that the author is at his desk among papers and books. Like the Old Testament prophets he seems to have so much affinity for, Gaspar is on the hunt for words that do not lie, hoping not to "fill the air with the withering noise / of the lying voices" ("I Wash the Buddha")—a worthy and humbling goal for any artist.

In "I Can See the Lapis Lazuli," he says that "of course, it's all about Milton." I see this invocation of Milton and his *Paradise Lost* as an instructive if somewhat playful way of encapsulating the entire collection. Unlike Milton's epic, which famously aims to "justify the ways of God to men," Gaspar's aim is more modest. The poems tend to revolve around a single character—often a stand-in for the poet himself—and his days, his loneliness, and his small joys, which are often "enough" (an important word in this book) but not always. These prose poems are certainly erudite and intertextual, but it is a book that can be enjoyed by anyone—and the theological landscape is not a totally Christian one; Buddha appears often, Allah is mentioned, and some more ancient and esoteric gods make appearances as well. Crone, in "Petroglyphs, Black Notebook #6," is one of my favorites. Gaspar's simple acknowledgement that "we are ignorant and fearful" and his desperate plea that "You must understand us" ("Are We Not Safe Here?") is about as much "justifying" as we get and need.

*Late Rapturous's* theological (I use the term loosely) vision is bifurcated; on the one hand, there is the boy who grew up in an Azorean-American Catholic community—as Gaspar did—and, on the other hand, there is the man who has spent years not only read-



ing Milton but also throwing himself into the scholastic and exegetical tradition of the Church fathers. Gaspar is deliberately concerned with spiritual and moral matters—a subject that he feels is often verboten in contemporary American poetics—but he is not at all interested in dogma. In "The Early Revelations," he wants to "clap / someone's soul into the marrow-bone of a tree / so you can finally say 'soul' without making everybody nervous." One does not have to fear being preached at because Gaspar's practice has never been about giving advice. The poet admits that he is "frail and fickle in all my creeds and philosophies" ("Hart Crane, Black Notebook #2, Los Angeles"). In "Black Notebook #9—Los Angeles—In Bed with an Old Book of Chinese Poetry," he admits

He didn't find god there. He didn't find the self  
and its deadly  
sins. It was all about how he'd really be if he . . .  
turned  
down the noise and stopped all that goddamned  
smiling.

In a 2009 interview in *Verdad*, Gaspar said he would always "see the world through the eyes of that skinny, dazzled kid that I was. I seem to be able to live with that dazzled boy." In *Late Rapturous*, this is the same boy who after years of schooling "still pronounced Mozart wrong" ("The Marriage of Figaro"). This younger self haunts this book, haunts the successful man of letters that Gaspar has become. One gets the feeling while reading these poems that the younger Gaspar is forcing the older man to write out his desires, to make him feel as if he belongs to that world of letters so distant from the working-class world he was born into. Sadly, it is the one thing the older man cannot give him. The more he belongs to the world of letters, the more he must force himself to the outside if it is ever going to mean anything this late in life—after

books and words and people thinking,  
beat-up notebooks from the dollar store,  
scribbling the world  
into them . . . Where's it all going, this clatter,

this wonder,  
this rant against anguish? I tell myself to  
stay calm.  
("All Dharmas Are Marked with Emptiness")

Gaspar's book delights in the joys of the post-lapsarian world, where the rapture is, where "the Dark Beautiful One [Milton's Lucifer] . . . that / I have somehow come to love and embrace, though the prophets warned me" ("I Can See the Lapis Lazuli") gets his luster, where there is "[s]plendor and / disaster" ("Black Notebook #7, Desert Queen Motel"). The writing is never finished, never complete, and never whole—and although all this entropy often frightens him, the need to nail it down with words frightens him no less. Yet he would have it no other way.

In the title poem, Gaspar goes searching for de Kooning's "late rapturous style" in the real paintings he has only seen prints of, so he can bear witness to the work that made them, to the "working, working, / re-working." This is also an invitation for us to do the same with the poems. The poetic voice is always on the move in this book, longing, as so many who have written about the road have done, for some place to call home. But the longing doesn't reveal itself to Gaspar as a place but as a desire for more work, more time to work. The longing for a place is *almost* totally absent from this book ("Black Notebook, #5, Lisbon" being the exception). Gaspar, like Cain, has taught himself not to look back, and yet the loss follows him in every city he passes through, in the eyes of all the people he sees. Needing to reach out, never being able to fully connect, and realizing only so late in life that this is where we all begin and where we all end. We start in the desert (in the fires of prophecy) and end at the sea wondering if we are the kind who are "whole / and upright" ("September 10<sup>th</sup>—Black Notebook, Unnumbered") or if we are like Simon Magus flying around Rome, buzzing over the heads of the dazzled crowd only to be brought crashing to the ground to die an ignominious death because our resurrections are lies ("Black Notebook, Psalm 15, Dead Sea Scrolls, New Bedford"). Gaspar subjects himself to a kind of Hippocratic Oath: "Do no harm, I told myself" ("Do No Harm"). This, above all else, is essential so that he can save himself from the "blame for this shattered world and our tattered natures" ("The Secret Book of John").

Ultimately, these are poems about the work of art and the art of living—sermons without the sermonizing, homilies explicating ordinary things big and small, intimations more than anything else. His poems are about the desire to walk in madness with a living god, however short that god may fall of perfection, burning cities and collecting all the ashes and the loveliness. The poet yearns for erasure in one breath and then for the graphomaniacal compulsion to record words against time in the next—and all the while is fully aware of learning nothing: "I do what I can, I piece things together, whatever fits. / It's not much. This is the only sort of thing I can make out of it" ("I Piece Things Together").

CARLO MATOS is an Azorean-American poet and fiction writer. He is the author of three books: *A School for Fishermen*, *Counting Sheep Till Doomsday*, and *Ibsen's Foreign Contagion*. He teaches writing and literature at the City Colleges of Chicago.

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# Carmen Cicero



By Bill Evaul

**“Y**OU KNOW THAT tune—de da di da da, da di da da,” he sings a few bars. In just about any conversation with Carmen Cicero, you’ll likely hear musical phrases roll off his tongue like liquid silver. These phrases are not frivolous, nor are they gratuitously injected into the conversation. They do serve to illuminate his point about this musician, that performance, or some other situation around music. One instantly receives more information, more nuance, and a feeling of being in a spell.

This is certainly an artistic approach to conveying one’s message. In the visual arts, it’s like the refining of one’s vision with different points of view and different vocabularies to make a statement. It comes instinctually to a painter. For over fifty years, Cicero has been known primarily as a painter. As a member of the fabled Long Point Gallery in Provincetown and a long-term artist with June Kelly Gallery in New York, he has enjoyed much success and recognition for his artwork—which has been collected by major museums—drawing great reviews in the *New York Times* and winning numerous awards.

But Carmen Cicero is not only a painter. In fact, he started out as a musician—a prodigy if you will—and had a good career, appearing in *DownBeat* magazine and gigging regularly before ever picking up a brush.

“I never thought seriously about being a professional painter, but I did think about becoming a professional musician,” reflects Cicero.

Cicero’s father insisted that all the children in the family should be musical and assigned each an instrument. Cicero would have preferred the piano, but was given the clarinet. His early musical training began conventionally in elementary school, where he learned the basics—chromatic scales and such—and quickly distinguished himself by mastering the classic *Flight of the Bumblebee*, the orchestral interlude written by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov for his opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*. An enthusiastic student, Cicero enjoyed practicing and set his sights on a musical career. He sought out professional tutoring. He continued to play at home with his family. He played in the school band and orchestra and earned a coveted spot in the New Jersey All-State Orchestra by impressing the jury with his rendition of *Flight of the Bumblebee*.

ABOVE: BILL EVAUL, *CICERO AT LOFT PARTY, NEW YORK CITY, 2001*, PEN AND INK ON PAPER, 9 BY 12 INCHES





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One of Cicero's first teachers was Charles Thetford. "An excellent teacher and damn good clarinet player," says Cicero. "He played first chair clarinet in the Radio City Music Hall Orchestra." Thetford inspired him by showing that studying arpeggios and playing scales can be very interesting and musical.

"Da da da di da di dil la," scats Cicero quickly, "and when you can do that with ease, *Flight of the Bumblebee* isn't as difficult as it sounds." But it is very impressive.

That particular skill served him well over the years. Not only did it win him first clarinet chair in the All-State Orchestra, it earned him some cash. Cicero, his brother Don, and good friend Lou were members of the Knot Hole band—a kind of pep band dressed in uniforms, that played at baseball games. One day, on their way home after rehearsing at the local high school, a man on the street saw the three young musicians and, recognizing the clarinet case, shouted out, "Hey you kid with the clarinet, I'll betcha a dollar you can't play *Flight of the Bumblebee*." Knowing Cicero's prowess, the other boys snickered and pushed Carmen forward. After a brief performance they were a dollar richer.

Cicero's third professional teacher was Joe Allard, the legendary saxophonist and clarinetist who was the teacher of many great sax players and played with Toscanini. For his favorite students, Allard would go to the Buffet Crampon clarinet factory in Paris, where he was well-known by the proprietors and allowed special access to pick out the finest instruments. So his pupil, Cicero, was the fortunate recipient of "a Stradivarius" of clarinets.

With that instrument and his passion for music, Cicero started playing in a trio, working three or four gigs on any given weekend, providing music for countless bar mitzvahs, weddings, and parties.

Cicero then expanded his professional pursuits by playing in bigger bands in the "Borscht Belt"—the famous Jewish summer resorts in the Catskills of upstate New York. The band was always a mix of ethnicities—Jews, Italians, Poles, and more—and the only judgments passed were along musical lines. If you could play, you were respected.

Asking Cicero about his favorite saxophone players elicits a litany of great names and their attributes and also provides a tour of the history of American jazz. His years of experience as a professor in academia enable him to cite examples and back them up with explanations and critiques.

"Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young," Cicero says, "Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Phil Woods . . . of course, I can go on and on. But now, after years and years, my all-time favorite finally is Stan Getz. He's a very lyrical player in the tradition of Lester Young; he can be very romantic in his style."

"But really," Cicero continues, "the top of any sax player's list has gotta be Charlie Parker. I remember when he first came on the scene—he was so startling and overwhelming in his power, his ideas, and technique. After that, any saxophone player you met would say, 'Do you remember the first time you heard Charlie Parker?' His impact was felt across the board. There were musicians who actually threw their instruments away after hearing him play."

Cicero was drafted into the army during World War II, and with his musical résumé he became the leader of an eighteen-piece band that entertained the troops at Camp John Hay. One night near Baguio, Philippines, Cicero heard music wafting across the camp.

"I started wandering around the camp, searching for the source among hundreds of tents," says Cicero. "I finally found the tent, went in, and discovered a pickup group of musicians playing jazz."

He became instant friends with them and hung out, just listening. When there was a lull in the music, Cicero asked the proverbial question: "Do you remember the first time you heard Charlie Parker?"

A voice from the upper bunk rose up and said, "Yeah, I was right here in this cot, and I fell right out onto the ground."

**AFTER THE WAR**, Cicero attended Newark State Teachers College and almost casually happened upon the art department, which had an excellent faculty. There, Cicero became open to the vast possibilities of modern art and was exposed to Picasso and the American Abstract Expressionists. This new painting, with its bold and progressive language and its ability to cast a spell, to dazzle, catapulted Cicero into a new career as a painter. However, his musical career remained in full swing and thus began the long intertwining of creative expression.

Cicero's other influence at Newark State was John O. Gerrish. "A marvelous musician," recalls Cicero. "He was an organist, pianist, orchestra and chorus leader, and great teacher."

"He was really good and could do something I admired very much. I remember him rehearsing the chorus and sometimes the sopranos would go off, so on the piano or organ he would play the soprano part. And while he was playing the soprano part, maybe the tenors would go off, so he would continue playing the soprano part and sing the tenor part. And then maybe the basses would go off, and he would play the bass part as well. And he blended it all so effortlessly."

"On top of all this he was a baseball fan, and while he was playing a very complicated Bach fugue, he would lean over and say, 'Hey Carmen, how'd the Yankees do today?'"

Cicero learned a lot about the nuance of music from Gerrish, whose favorite composer was Mozart.

"Well, after Mozart all the other composers sound a little crude," Gerrish would say.

Cicero didn't quite understand at the time.

"To my mind at that time, a composer like Haydn or Beethoven didn't sound all that different from Mozart."

That is, until the magic of Mozart's elegance flowed his way.

"One day, several years later, I was driving in my car and Mozart's Thirty-ninth Symphony came on, you know the one, 'ba da da da dat da da da da.' And suddenly I realized what John Gerrish was saying. I really felt the perfect, natural, and magical way his music moves. He's like a great lover—he goes from one theme to another in a seamless, refined, and elegant way. Of course, what's really great about Mozart is intangible. I think of his





BILL EVAUL, *CICERO WITH KENT HEWITT & MARSHALL WOOD AT CICERO'S HOUSE PARTY*, 2009, COLORED PENCIL ON PAPER, 10 BY 9 INCHES

*Jupiter Symphony* as one of the greatest artistic achievements of all time."

Keeping his dual careers of music and art vibrant and alive seemed natural to Cicero. The boundaries blurred as energy flowed freely and many experiences merged. Although he was proficient in a wide variety of musical styles, Cicero preferred a jazz style so new and innovative that it hadn't even been named yet. As an Abstract Expressionist and Figurative Expressionist painter, Cicero was working with a wholly new vocabulary of visual expression, and it was natural that his creative work in music would take the new road too.

Cicero formed a trio with a couple of top-flight musicians, Vinnie Burke and Al Senurchio. They honed their distinct style, which came to be called "free-form jazz" or "free jazz." This is an innovative, improvisational, free-association style of playing that is now a unique genre in the jazz canon. There might have been other musicians in the world exploring this style, but Cicero and his friends didn't know about it. The trio did lots of college gigs and private parties, and made the jazz club scene in New York City. It was at one of these gigs that a photographer from *DownBeat* captured these musicians in action and put them in the pantheon of progressive jazz.

While painters work primarily alone, they do like to get together with other painters who "speak the language." Cicero's artist friends included George Mueller, Frank Roth, and Babe Shapiro. They would get together to look at shows and talk about their work. These sessions, with their lively exchange of ideas, were a kind of parallel to an ensemble of musicians.

Occasionally, there were crossovers. One day, Shapiro brought along another friend to these sessions, and he fit right in. His artistic sensibilities were in tune with these painters; he spoke their language. Mike Melillo became an important part of the group.

"It was a few weeks before I found out he wasn't a painter at all but a jazz pianist and composer," Cicero recalls, "and after that we started playing, mostly free-form jazz."

Melillo was a natural with the free-form style that Cicero was just developing, and they gigged

together for over ten years before Melillo revealed his professional history. Yes, he had played with Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, and Art Farmer, and, oh yes, Zoot Sims, Clark Terry, and Chet Baker. And of course he was with the Sonny Rollins quartet for three years before joining up with the Phil Woods Quintet, touring nationally and internationally. In the 1980s, *DownBeat* magazine dubbed them "number one acoustic jazz group" over several consecutive years.

"I couldn't believe he was playing with me all that time and never revealed his remarkable musical history," says an astonished Cicero. "He has to be the most modest man in the world."

Cicero waxes poetic when talking about his favorite musicians, players of all stripes, and he launches into memories of playing on Cape Cod with great musicians such as Ed Higgins and Kent Hewitt.

"Ed Higgins. He was just a wonderful musician, very generous. I was honored to play with him," says Cicero. "He liked what I played and even wrote me a letter complimenting me." But it was Kent Hewitt who brought Cicero back to his musical roots. Why, you would ask, did Cicero need to be "brought back" to his roots? It's a circuitous story.

IN THE 1960S, Cicero lived in an elegant neighborhood in Englewood, New Jersey. One day, his girlfriend at the time went to see a clairvoyant, who told her details about her boyfriend, describing Cicero perfectly, including references to his artwork and musicianship, and telling her he led a "charmed life."

"And it was true," says Cicero. "I never had to take an outside job—what do they say? 'For the artist, work kills the soul.' I made money playing music, I painted all the time, had lots of girlfriends, a great studio, vacations on Cape Cod... yes, a charmed life."

In fact, Cicero was gaining a reputation in the art world and decided to relocate to New York City. In the month before moving, Cicero let the insurance lapse on his New Jersey studio and apartment and his charmed life lapsed too. A terrible fire broke out, destroying everything (thankfully, nobody was

injured). Apartment, studio, all his personal effects, all his paintings, an original Miró given to him by the venerable artist himself, his extensive collection of hi-fi equipment, and his most treasured possession, his Buffet clarinet, were all lost.

"My charmed life came to an end!" Cicero exclaims. He hastens to add that he regained that status eventually, but, meanwhile, despondent, Cicero moved to New York with virtually nothing. He had no instrument and no will to replace his precious Buffet clarinet with anything inferior. He lost the desire to play his instrument, gave up his musical career, and redoubled his devotion to art.

Several years later, Cicero received an invitation from the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, New Jersey. He was offered a one-man show of his collages. While in the excitement of planning the show with the museum curators, Cicero blurted out, "I'm also a musician, so maybe I could do a concert too."

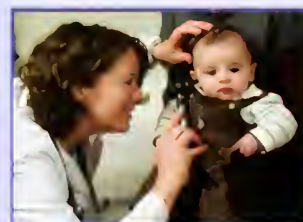
To his surprise, they responded enthusiastically, "Yes, that would be great!"

Cicero left that meeting, went home, sat down, and said to himself, "Carmen! What did you say? You haven't picked up an instrument in years. You don't even have one. You can't play. What are you going to do?"

Luckily for Cicero, the lead-time on the museum show was six months, so he devised a musical rehabilitation program for himself. Someone gave him the Selmer saxophone he still plays today. Through chance or providence, it happened to be a top-flight instrument. He settled into a groove of musical self-discipline and practiced alone in his loft for

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He played sometimes six hours a day until [Hewitt] would bleed and he saw himself developing a 'jazz musician attitude,' becoming more and more irresponsible about life while being totally absorbed in the music.

Cicero explains, "It was a wonderful feeling, though. I was getting my 'chops' back and developing my musical skills."

Contacting people from his old days as a clarinet player, Cicero enlisted a few great musician friends who were still playing regularly.

"When it came time for the concert, there was a big audience—maybe a couple hundred people—and I had to get up and say a few words of introduction. Since I got the job, I was the leader. That's peculiar—it's not always the best musician who is the leader, it's the man who gets the job," Cicero explains. "Of course, I was really nervous and insecure because we hadn't rehearsed together. But these guys were all artists, real players, and there's a saying in jazz that when you're playing a lot you 'can swing right off.' So I counted off the first tune, 'a-one, two, three, four' and I heard that special jazz sound that great musicians make. I heard the drums and those symbols 'whoosh' and I heard that beautiful Steinway piano, great bass, and the sound was gorgeous. It felt wonderful. After the gig they talked to me as if I was one of them."

Riding the wave of his first jazz gig in years, Cicero brought his saxophone with him to Cape Cod that summer. When Cicero dropped in for dinner at the old Weathering Heights Restaurant,

he was thrilled to find playing there a great band called "Jasmine." At the piano was Kent Hewitt.

Cicero became a regular there. In the casual conversation that occurred during the band's breaks, Hewitt and Cicero discovered artistic and musical common ground. Hewitt invited Cicero to sit in with the band.

"I was still recovering from the trauma of the fire and hadn't been playing much," Cicero explains, "so I was a little reluctant. Kent understood this and was very encouraging."

On the next night, Cicero brought along his saxophone and sat in with the band. Mutual respect flowed from the start. Hewitt recognized Cicero's innate sensibility and overlooked his technical "rustiness." They hit it off so well together that they started playing as a duo, excelling in the free-form genre and taking gigs together.

**JACQUELINE AND V. HENRY ROTHSCHILD** were patrons of the arts in Provincetown and occasionally hosted parties for the Long Point Gallery artists. Often, Hewitt and Cicero would play a couple of sets of their free-form jazz. On their breaks, the artists would sit around, ask questions, and discuss the creative process. The parallels and cross-currents between artistic disciplines pointed to the same sources of creative expression.

"It was a most profound experience," relates Hewitt. "We would create good music with imagination, wit, and even humor and allow anything to happen. I began to see the authentic spirit of artistic creation develop and how as musicians we were

pursuing the same explorations of creativity and dynamism between man and nature as were the painters."

Hewitt met the bassist Marshall Wood when he was playing a few gigs on the Cape with his wife, Donna Byrne, one of the best jazz vocalists in the country. Hewitt made sure that they got together with Cicero, and they formed a group that still performs concerts at the Wellfleet Public Library, PAAM, and Cicero's loft in New York. Wood tours the world and records with Tony Bennett now, but he always finds time to play with Hewitt and Cicero.

"Carmen is definitely talented in the way that I appreciate the most in a musician—he's got 'big ears,'" says Wood. "Of course, I don't mean their physical size. It's jazz lingo for someone who can hear things deep into the music and listens carefully to each musician in the band. And that's not always the case. Guys with big ears are few and far between, but when you find them it's always a pleasure to play together. I think he loves music as much as he loves painting—they're the same thing, aren't they after all?"

**THE CONVERGENCE OF** creativity and the ability to set a mood is common to all artistic pursuit, regardless of the medium or genre. Cicero relates an experience he had that brought these intangible ideas together in one place.

"I had a true epiphany in life. I was in a strange mood and listening to a tune called 'Lotus Blossom,' a poignant tune by Billy Strayhorn, while reading *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy and looking at a new book of paintings by Albert Pinkham Ryder. As I was going from one artist to the other, I had a very significant, very profound insight: All great art produces the same feeling. Therein lies the commonality of the arts." The dreamlike spell was the same magic in the hands of a musician, writer, or painter.

These are creative elements that Cicero uses in his own work too. In his academic life, Cicero gave lectures on the commonality between art forms.

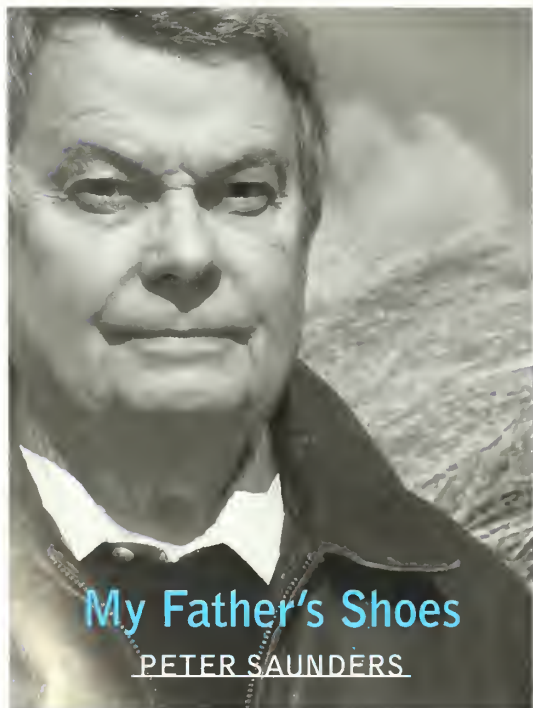
"All great art creates a spell which draws you in," explains Cicero, "whether it's a painting, a book, a poem, or a piece of music."

Kent Hewitt loves playing music with Cicero for that very reason. Hewitt says, "I just love it. I'll be sitting at my piano just about to start the gig and Carmen will lean over to me and say, 'OK, Kent, let's create a spell.'"

"I'm still deeply involved with music," Cicero says. "I have very expensive hi-fi equipment, and I listen to jazz and classical all the time. I still give concerts every summer on Cape Cod and have the occasional loft party in New York. Music has given me more joy in my life than just about anything I can think of. As Artie Shaw once said about music, 'When it's beautiful it's even better than sex.'"

*BILL EVAUL has been sketching from life since he could lift a pencil. He has made many drawings of musicians at work, especially Carmen Cicero and his band dating from their first days playing at the Flagship to Cicero's NYC loft party last winter. Cicero's dual career as an artist and musician inspired Evald to do the same. He now plays bass and sometimes trumpet with several local bands and individual musicians.*

## From Provincetown Arts Press:



### MY FATHER'S SHOES

BY PETER SAUNDERS

*"My Father's Shoes is a beautiful book about memory, family, art, choices, failure, relations, love, reconciliation, and the pleasures of growing older. It is filled with the birdsong and sea-changes of Cape Cod, a place it so affectionately and accurately reflects in poems like the award-winning 'Cape Cottage in Winter.' Saunders is a poet who cares about ordinary townspeople, living and dying, working for his daily bread, small moments of kindness, deep affections. The book is a treasure."*

—LIZ ROSENBERG

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# Tennessee Williams and Music

By Rory Marcus

**D**AVID KAPLAN, AUTHOR of *Tennessee Williams in Provincetown* (Hansen Publishing Group), is a vital force in fostering the success of the annual Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in Provincetown, which again takes place over four days at the end of September. In his groundbreaking book, studded with original research, Kaplan brings out the significance of the four summers Williams spent in Provincetown—in 1940, 1941, 1944, and 1947—tracing the paths where Williams went from unknown to famous, where his heart was broken, where he deliberately bumped up against the history of Eugene O'Neill, and where his acquaintance with Provincetown artists helped create the sophisticated and layered coloring of his plays; in particular, Kaplan brings out Williams's appropriations of the theories of Hans Hofmann, the legendary abstractionist whose classes in Provincetown attracted so many students who are now themselves famous artists.

While researching this fall's festival, Kaplan learned from Laura Shabor's online "Notes from Land's End" about an exhibition of white-line woodcuts at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, a process of printmaking Provincetown made famous in the days of Eugene O'Neill, using the space between colors as a moat of white line that keeps colors from blending, allowing the printmaker to make multicolored prints without successive impressions. PAAM was closed on the day Kaplan planned to visit, so Annie Longley, Manager of Communications at the Museum, asked Bill Evaul, a seasoned white-line practitioner, to guide Kaplan on a private tour of the show.

"I was tickled to do it," Evaul said, "knowing that I would be surprising a friend who did not know the extent of my involvement in art."

They met at the museum. The exhibition, *White Lines: Contemporary Woodblock Prints*, included the work of several woodcut artists, but Evaul dominated the walls with his enormous woodcut *Way Out Willie*—an image of a fourteen-piece band complete with stage lights and a frenzied audience.

"I didn't know Bill as an artist. I knew him socially as another beachside bon vivant," Kaplan said. On the spot, he asked Evaul to create woodcuts for the 2012 theme of the festival, "Tennessee Williams and Music."



BILL EVAUL, TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, SMOKE INTO SONG, 2012, WOODCUT, 24 BY 18 INCHES



BILL EVAUL PULLING THE PRINT *HER FATHER'S RECORDS* OFF THE BLOCK FOR *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*, 2012

The theme was a perfect fit for Evaul—brilliantly harmonic—who has made prints of musicians of all genres for years in his *Muse-Musicians* series. In *The Joint Is Jumpin'*, he is clearly evoking rock and roll, while *Good Vibes* shows a jazz combo, and *The Happy Quartet* is a tribute to the chamber music of the violin. He has also been working on ideas for a series featuring Provincetown playwrights, including George Cram Cook, Eugene O'Neill, and Susan Glaspell. Tennessee Williams is the first of his completed works in this series.

With Kaplan, Evaul was offered the opportunity to collaborate with another artist, an artist of the theater. Evaul began to feel he was a member of a cast, an ensemble. He had been reading biographies of Tennessee Williams and the scripts of his plays. Evaul realized he could make a woodcut of Tennessee Williams listening to music and twist the smoke coming out of his cigarette into shapes that could register as musical notes, becoming measures of pleasure. Evaul said he "morphs the swirls into musical notes."

Kaplan believes that "theater is the art of human relationships." Evaul's woodcuts tell stories that engage viewers to imagine what's going on between people. A bass player for twenty years, Evaul sees music from a backstage perspective. In Provincetown, the festival venues vary; over time, the whole town has become a stage, with performances in the streets, in churches, on a porch of a house, in hotel rooms, on the wharf, in a tent on the beach.

"As Williams's words play out in the town, they share the town's distinctive character," Kaplan explained. "I've come to want distinctively





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BILL EVAUL, *BLANCHE VARIATIONS*, 2012, WHITE-LINE WOODCUT, 20 BY 16 INCHES

Provincetown visual artists to help shape the festival as well. Last year, Ewa Nogiec, at the suggestion of Berta Walker, created multiple-exposure graphic icons for each of the 2011 festival shows, echoing that year's theme, 'Double Exposure: Past and Present.' This year, Bill's white-line woodcuts possess a hands-on quality and immediacy, apt for

expressing what live performance of music and theater do."

A key production this fall is *The Glass Menagerie*, in which music is central to memory; Tom, the play's narrator, says, "In memory, everything seems to happen to music." For Kaplan, *The Glass Menagerie* sets up how music works for Williams, embodied in the character of Laura, "a girl with a limp who hears dance hall tunes across the street."

For a long time, Evaul had been thinking about doing a painting of a jazz singer. In New York recently, he went to hear jazz at the Plaza Hotel. He saw this amazing singer in a gorgeous dress; he thought, "That's the image I want." Kaplan saw the metaphor at once, telling Evaul, "The pianist eggs the singer past innocence, urging her to get down into the heat of the music." Evaul's image is about the relationship of two women; an androgynous piano player, wearing a tuxedo with stiletto footwear, inspires the singer to show forth. If we look closely at the image of *Blanche Variations*

from *The Tennessee Williams Songbook*, the bass player is Bill Evaul, a sketch in the background, wearing his signature moustache. ▲

RORY MARCUS is a freelance writer and media consultant for the annual Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in Provincetown. For more details, see [www.twptown.org](http://www.twptown.org).

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# Bernard Greenhouse

## A Young Cellist's Perspective

By Saskia Keller

**W**HEN I FIRST picked up a cello in the third grade, I certainly wasn't aware that there was a virtuoso cellist and owner of a Stradivarius one town over. In fact, I can't remember exactly why I chose to play such a large and daunting instrument for a girl of eight years. Maybe I wanted to assert myself as different, for my class at the Truro Central School consisted of fifteen or sixteen violin students. I soon found, however, that playing my cello was like embracing a friend; the vibrations of the low tones I felt in my chest and in the floor were comforting.

Although I realize I'm not likely to become a great musician like Bernard Greenhouse, who passed away this last year, I feel as though our lives intersected in several places. During the time I was taking my first cello lessons, I had the opportunity to see Greenhouse play at the Wellfleet Congregational Church. Though at the time I didn't fully understand the significance of meeting him, I timidly asked him to autograph my program during the intermission, which I still have to this day.

It wasn't until several years later that I watched his videotaped master classes at Wigmore Hall. Greenhouse corrected his students by example, playing with such dexterity and ease that the idea of attempting to emulate him was intimidating. One of the pupils played the Prelude from the first Bach cello suite, which was a piece I was learning at the time, the cello suites being standard repertoire for students approaching more advanced levels of playing. For that reason it was especially useful to listen to Greenhouse's feedback, which I tried to follow to the best of my ability. He emphasized making each phrase sound different and unexpected, while not altering the precision of the rhythm.

After performing in a master class myself, I came to appreciate even more how difficult it must have been to play for such a renowned cellist, enduring but absorbing his harsh criticism, all in front of an audience. When Matt Haimovitz visited Cape Cod to play with the Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra, a half-dozen or so cellists were selected to play for him. Haimovitz teaches at McGill University and has made many recordings with Deutsche Grammophon and his own label, Oxingale Records, including a version of Jimi Hendrix's *Star-Spangled Banner* for solo cello.

The entire process was extremely nerve-wracking, and besides I was not fully happy with the piece my teacher Liz Schultze had assigned me. Squire's

*Tarantella*, although difficult, didn't require the tonal and soulful sound I did best, instead demanding a certain amount of audacity. In fact, I was so nervous before playing that when Haimovitz casually asked me, "Will you be playing the piano accompaniment," meaning will there be a pianist playing as part of a duet, I responded, surprised, "No, I play the cello."

Matt Haimovitz studied with Leonard Rose, who, like Greenhouse, studied with Felix Salmond at Juilliard, although Rose and Greenhouse only met later in their careers. (Greenhouse studied with Emanuel Feuermann and Pablo Casals as well.) I don't know whether Haimovitz visited Greenhouse during the time of his concert with the Cape Cod Symphony, but it isn't unlikely. Haimovitz also studied with Yo-Yo Ma; Ma played Saint-Saëns's Cello Concerto as well as "Song of the Birds," Bernard Greenhouse's signature encore, this year at the Cape Cod Symphony as a tribute to the late cellist.

Recently I started working with two other young musicians from Cape Cod, a pianist and violinist, as part of a trio conceived by Stephanie Weaver of the Cape Cod Conservatory. We are known as simply "The Cape Cod Conservatory Trio," a name admittedly much less original than the Beaux Arts Trio, which was made up of Greenhouse, violinist Daniel Guilet, and pianist Menahem Pressler. Playing in a trio is much different from playing in an orchestra because it's necessary to show more leadership, as there is no conductor. I've also found that I feel more involved; oftentimes in a large orchestra I can't even hear myself play.

This past summer I decided it was extremely important that elementary school students be introduced to the cello in an informal way at an early age so that they realize what a beautiful instrument it is. I hoped to raise enough money for the Truro Central School to purchase a good quality instrument for teaching purposes. I packed up my cello along with some music and played at the elementary school for hours during Truro Treasures weekend. It was funny to see the tiny children pass by, transfixed. Having raised only \$300, I was extremely lucky to come into contact through e-mail with Tom Delbanco, the brother of Greenhouse's son-in-law and a friend of Truro resident Carol Green; Green had passed by while I was playing and wanted to help my cause.



SASKIA KELLER WORKING WITH ALEXANDER REDMAN-DUTOIT PHOTO BY MARY MAXWELL

"There is a company called Reuning & Son Violins in Boston that owes me a favor," Delbanco wrote to me. "They will donate a \$3,000 half-sized cello for only \$500." Later, I discovered that the auction of Bernard Greenhouse's "Countess of Stanlein" Stradivarius cello was being managed by Reuning, which explained the connection and donation. Greenhouse's 1707 Stradivarius, which he had played for fifty-four years, was masterfully restored in 2000 by René Morel, who coincidentally passed away last year. This auction was unusual in that the highest bidder did not necessarily receive the cello. Greenhouse had wanted to ensure that the individual really played his cello, not just placed it in a museum or treated it as an investment. In the end, the recipient was a teenage cellist from Montreal, who almost certainly has met Haimovitz.

Although I'm only an amateur cellist, I identify with Bernard Greenhouse's love of teaching and his insistence on playing with sincerity and feeling. Giving lessons to the six- to eight-year-olds at Truro Central School, trying to instill in them my love for cello playing, feels like a smaller version of Greenhouse's classes with his many pupils, who have been imprinted with his technique and sensitivity. Just as Greenhouse passed on the methods and approaches he learned from his great teachers, his influence on young musicians of Cape Cod continues. ♫

*SASKIA KELLER is a sophomore at Nauset Regional High School, where she is a writer and editor on the school's literary magazine Cross Currents. She takes part in several regional musical groups, including the Cape Cod Symphony Youth Orchestra, Nauset Regional High School Orchestra, and Cape Cod Conservatory Trio. She is interested in the history and philosophy of music, particularly the viola da gamba, a seven-stringed Renaissance instrument and predecessor to the cello. This is her first publication in a national magazine.*





## The Unreliable Narrator in Film

DREAMING THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

By Howard Karren

**"Y**es, this is Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, California," says an unseen, calm baritone that distinctly resembles the actor William Holden's, confirming what is happening on-screen in '50s black and white. "It's about five o'clock in the morning," the voice continues. "That's the homicide squad, complete with detectives and newspapermen. A murder has been reported from one of those great big houses in the 10,000 block. You'll read about it in the late editions, I'm sure. You'll get it over your radio and see it on television. Because an old-time star is involved. One of the biggest. But before you hear it all distorted and blown out of proportion, before those Hollywood columnists get their hands on it, maybe you'd like to hear the facts. The whole truth. If so, you've come to the right party."

The whole truth—a peculiar claim coming from an as-yet-unknown voice-over in the opening shots of a fictional Hollywood film, Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd.* And yet Joe Gillis, the narrator, is telling the truth, an impossible blend of subjective and objective that could only exist in a movie. "You see," he says—and in fact, we do—"the body of a young man was found floating in the pool of her mansion with two shots in his back and one in his stomach. Nobody important, really. Just a movie writer with a couple of B pictures to his credit. The poor dope—he always wanted a pool. Well, in the end he got himself a pool. Only the price turned out to be a little high. . . ." The watery image of a lifeless, floating body, seen from below it, submerged in the pool, with cops and reporters looking on from above, dissolves away.

And then come the magic words: "Let's go back about six months and find the day when it all started," Gillis says, and in a subtle, seamless shift in time and point of view, he is about to identify himself with the pronoun "I" as a character on-screen—one who, if you were following closely, looks very much like the dead man in the pool. "I was living in an apartment house above Franklin and Ivar," Gillis says, still in voice-over, as he (that is, William Holden) appears in a white bathrobe through the window of his Hollywood flat, sitting on his bed and typing away. "Things were tough at the moment. I hadn't worked in a studio for a long time. So I sat there grinding out original stories, two a week. Only I seemed to have lost my touch. Maybe they weren't original enough. Maybe they were too original. All I know is: they didn't sell." And that's where the narration ends—with a live buzzer at his door—and the film continues, for now at least, without the assistance of this voice from nowhere.



Nowhere and no-how. If Gillis is the man in the pool, he's dead—it's a corpse who is telling us this story! And it's the corpse of a professional storyteller—a pulp writer, a man who traffics in the stuff of fantasy and escape. The movie that unfolds is presumably told from his point of view, which begs the question: *What is a corpse's point of view?* Is he talking from heaven or hell? Either way, Gillis the narrator doesn't lie: though lies are told on-screen by characters and even by Gillis himself, as the disembodied narrator he corrects them for our benefit. This narrator shares with us a special kind of truth—his version of how he came to be murdered. It's an impossible dream, this story told by a corpse, filled with characters lying and dying and images that seem as real through a lens as they do through our own eyes.

Movie narrators are certainly capable of relaying distorted information or outright falsehoods. In some films there are multiple narrators, telling conflicting versions of the same story. But through it all the frustrating realness of moving images parades before us on-screen. And movie images don't lie—or so we think.

**IN LITERATURE**, a first-person narrator is identified by the pronoun “I,” and a third-person narrator is not identified at all. The narrator is either someone who exists within the story as a character (first person) or simply the authorial voice (third person). In movies there is a similar pattern, in that there is usually a first-person narrator or no narrator at all, but in the latter case, the authorial voice is more difficult to ascertain, since it's not really a voice. The stuff of literature is words, and words are purely abstract symbols of language—they don't look like what they are. Movie images, on the

other hand, are representational, and the process of understanding what they are feels more perceptual and reflexive than cognitive, since the visual and aural “reality” of words in literature must be interpreted and imagined in the head of the reader.

Photographic images, which are the building blocks of movie storytelling, are unique among other representational media, such as painting or drawing, in this reflexive quality. Even the most realistic painted artwork or *trompe l'oeil* effect is understood to have been created by someone—typically, the person who has signed it. But a photograph or movie image's likeness to the real world doesn't feel like an illusion accomplished by the hand of man. Instead, the lens of a camera seems to “capture” an image, not “create” it—and the image does more than mimic the real world, it's *connected* to the real world by optics, like a mirror.

We reflexively believe in the realness of photographic images—they are *evidence* of the world around us. And, indeed, they are used as evidence in a court of law. What you see in a picture is what was there in front of the lens when the aperture opened—the common wisdom is: pictures don't lie.

Though of course they do. The mechanical process of photography can easily fool us, and, in the end, it can be manipulated as much as paint on a canvas. Early theorists of film art during the silent era—most of them German Expressionists or Soviet revolutionaries—tended to be formalists: they saw aesthetic truth in the ways that movies twisted and transformed (or “synthesized”) the reality that they represent. By this line of thinking, simply reflecting what's put in front of the camera (like a mirror) wasn't art. But the introduction of sound in the late '20s, which only heightened the physical connection between image and reality, led to changes in the

way theorists looked at film. Much in the way that movement in motion pictures added to the “reality” of photographic images, sound only reinforced the likeness and believability of movie images.

The great André Bazin, in his mid-century essays about film art (collected as *What Is Cinema?*), insisted that it was reality—and its perceived automatic connection to the film image—and *not* distortions and manipulations that were the basis of the art of the cinema. If the image of a flower is beautiful on film, Bazin reasoned, it was the flower itself that held that beauty, and the function of the movie artist was to faithfully reproduce it, not to distort it or transform it. Bazin can be oversimplified—his aesthetic is complex and allows for all manner of formal elements to be integral to the filmmaker's art. What was important, however, was that he reordered the aesthetic universe of film so that it would properly venerate what people sought from the movies: *an illusion they could believe in.*

It's curious to note here that even animated films, which do not use photography to create images, follow the same rules of movie storytelling that live action does—close-ups, long shots, pans, cuts, crosscutting, etc. It's as if animators are trying to resemble live action even when they're overtly abstracting the real world. That impulse to be real on film has a powerful inertia: it's fueled by audience expectations and will often supersede any attempt to be supernatural or abstract. Our brains are simply trained that way: we want our fantasies to feel as if they're real—as if their magic is authentic, not fake.

So when filmmakers try to subvert that reflex objectification in movie images, they tend to do it subtly. Billy Wilder decided to have Joe Gillis's corpse narrate *Sunset Blvd.*, a supernatural touch that's hidden at the onset of the movie, despite the deadpan directness of the language. But then, with the sleight of hand of a master storyteller—and a slow dissolve—Wilder shifts to a time in which Gillis's corpse was very much alive and continues as if nothing untoward has happened. The rest of the film is essentially a flashback, and other than the fact that it's the flashback of a corpse, it's fairly



(FACING PAGE) WILDER AT HEART: THIS SHOT OF JOE GILLIS (WILLIAM HOLDEN) FLOATING DEAD IN NORMA DESMOND'S POOL IS THE FIRST HINT THAT THE NARRATOR OF *SUNSET BLVD.* IS ACTUALLY DEAD.

(ABOVE) DEAD MAN FLOATING: COPS AND REPORTERS OBSERVING THE BULLET-RIDDEN CORPSE OF JOE GILLIS, THE NARRATOR OF *SUNSET BLVD.*, IN NORMA DESMOND'S POOL AT DAWN.

(RIGHT) THE WRITE STUFF: JOE GILLIS TYPES FURIOUSLY AT A SCREENPLAY IN HIS HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT, THE VIEWER'S FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE NARRATOR OF *SUNSET BLVD.* WHEN HE'S STILL ALIVE.







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(ABOVE) FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE: LINDA HUNT PLAYS A PHOTOGRAPHER AND MEL GIBSON AN AUSTRALIAN REPORTER IN SUKARNO'S INDONESIA IN PETER WEIR'S *THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY*.



(LEFT) EYES WIDE SHUT: AS SUNNY VON BÜLOW IN *REVERSAL OF FORTUNE*, GLENN CLOSE NARRATES THE MOVIE WHILE IN A COMA.

conventional in terms of story structure from that point on.

Placing a story within the consciousness of a narrator is a well-established tradition in literature. For example, William Faulkner split up his great novel *The Sound and the Fury* into four sections; the first three are each told in first person by a different brother from a privileged Southern family, and the fourth is told by the author in third person, from the point of view of the black servants ("They endured"). The four sections don't contradict one another, they simply see the world in a different way, and they add to a spiritual and existential whole that doesn't really counter the validity of each narrator. Akira Kurosawa set up a similar structure for his film *Rashomon*, in which a murder is told from the point of view of four different individuals involved. But in Kurosawa's film, the clash of differing points of view is deliberately set up to make a resolution of fact impossible—none of these narrators' versions adds up to the truth. Kurosawa underlines the fact that some of these narrators *must* be lying. He's making the subversion of reality the point of *Rashomon*. By presenting objective images in clashing subjective contexts, he denies the objectivity of the images themselves. But it's the narrators who are lying, not the images.

In *Sunset Blvd.*, Wilder has a different approach. His narrator is not unreliable, per se, he's *an impossibility*. What's presented on-screen is neither a ghost nor a spirit, but a corpse, and a corpse doesn't have a memory, a voice, an eye. Gillis's very *existence* as a narrator is unreliable. And not coincidentally, his subject is the movies themselves—in the form of an aging silent-movie star, Norma Desmond. *Sunset Blvd.* is reflexive in content as well as form: it's a Hollywood

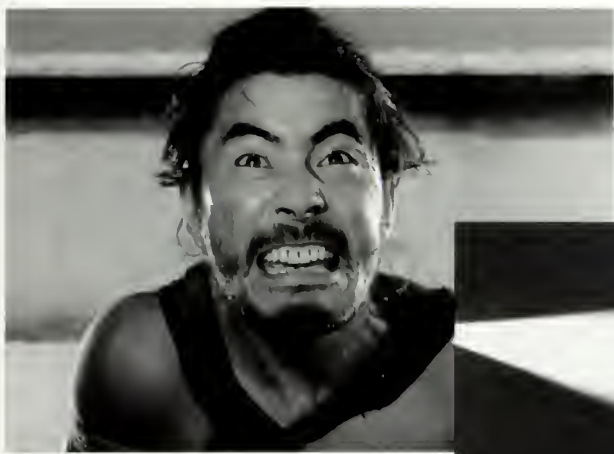
movie about Hollywood. What better way to mock the "realness" of a movie about movies than to present the source of its images as nonexistent?

First-person narration isn't the only way to convey point of view in films; there are also subjective point-of-view shots, which are physically meant to have been seen through a character's eye. But subjectivity in film is always tricky: shots are often edited together from first person to third person invisibly, and the images always tend to feel objective and reliable.

Movies like Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* go to great lengths to transform themselves into a madman's vision, and the Expressionist sets in that film do, in fact, look like decorated props. Alfred Hitchcock and Luis Buñuel delighted in dream imagery, which may or may not be rooted in one character's brain. But narrators in film are inherently first person: they exist on the sound track, disembodied, almost like a literary device, but usually rooted in a character on-screen. They put the entire film into a first-person context. The narrator in *The Ten Commandments* is an exception to this, voiced as it is by director Cecil B. DeMille but never identified, as if it were God or someone close to Him. The kind of narrator that brings the issue of reliability to a boil, however, is the kind that defies reality in the first place.

Joe Gillis is an example of that. Sunny von Bülow is another. In *Reversal of Fortune*, Barbet Schroeder's adaptation of Alan M. Dershowitz's book, Sunny (played by Glenn Close) lies in bed at the beginning of the film, in a coma from an overdose of insulin. Her husband, Claus, has been accused of attempting to murder her. And the story unfolds in flashback, framed by Sunny's narration. She has the





(ABOVE) EVERY BANDIT TELLS A STORY: TOSHIRO MIFUNE IN AKIRA KUROSAWA'S *RASHOMON*, THE STORY OF A MURDER TOLD FROM FOUR DIFFERING POINTS OF VIEW.



(RIGHT) PAST TENSE: JOE GILLIS (WILLIAM HOLDEN) AND NORMA DESMOND (GLORIA SWANSON) WATCH HER OLD MOVIES IN HER PRIVATE SCREENING ROOM IN BILLY WILDER'S *SUNSET BLVD.*

same ironic detachment as Gillis, and the same impossible condition: though unconscious, she manages to speak, to philosophize, and to set the stage for the domestic drama and alleged crime that followed.

Even more interesting is Billy Kwan, the Chinese-Australian dwarf living in Indonesia and played (as a man) by Linda Hunt in *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Based on a book by Christopher J. Koch, the movie was directed by Peter Weir and centers around the overthrow of the Indonesian president Sukarno, as observed by foreign press (an Australian reporter played by Mel Gibson) and officials (a British embassy assistant played by Sigourney Weaver). Billy, who works as a photojournalist, narrates the story, all the while typing notes about the political situation in Indonesia and his friends there, including the Gibson and Weaver characters. He fashions himself as a bit of a puppet-master, manipulating the two foreigners into a love affair, and is vicariously satisfied by their passion. And then (spoiler alert!), about two-thirds of the way through the film, Billy attempts a provocative act of political dissent and is killed.

Miraculously, *The Year of Living Dangerously* continues on, sans Billy. The situation in Indonesia erupts: Communists attempt a rebellion and the military, led by Suharto, stages a horribly bloody coup. The Westerners escape and the movie ends, as if they had escaped from a Third World nightmare that disappears upon awakening.

The shift in storytelling—originally emanating from Billy, a Machiavellian narrator, and ending up in a whirl of action and romance told without any narration at all—is seamless, and most viewers will not recognize the absurdity of it. Who, indeed, is telling the last third of the story? But that inertia of reality in the movie's images, especially at the point at which Billy dies and the story is being propelled forward with violence and suspense, overwhelms any doubts or questions. The narrator, in effect, is expendable.

Billy's character is a stand-in of sorts for both the viewer and the director. In the way he sees himself

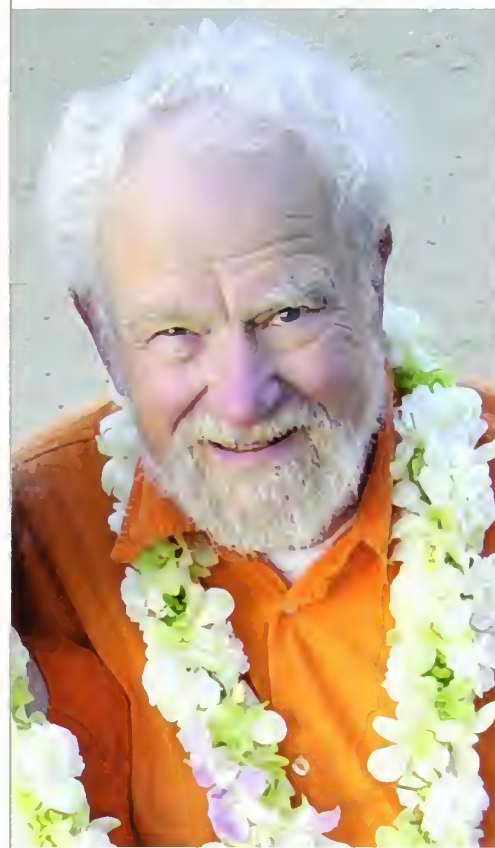
as the godlike manipulator of events, he is a director figure, a creator of art. In the way he voyeuristically and vicariously enjoys the sexual attraction of the leads, he is like the audience. And the movie, by killing him off, seems to be asserting that it can exist on a kind of automatic pilot, without a creator or an observer. It's a negation of everything that Billy did and that he felt. Billy's narration, in toto, is an impossible dream.

The recognition of impossibility comes rather late in *Sunset Blvd.* As the movie catches up with its opening scene, with Gillis floating in the pool, he narrates even more cynically than before, describing his own treatment as a corpse. "Well," he says, "this is where you came in. Back at the pool again. The one I always wanted." Notice the "I": the jig is up now, and he openly uses the first person in referring to the corpse. "It's dawn now, and they must have photographed me a thousand times. Then they got a couple of pruning books from the garden and fished me out, ever so gently. Funny how gentle people get with you once you're dead. They beached me like a harpooned baby whale and started to check the damage just for the record. By this time the whole joint was jumping. Cops, reporters, neighbors, passers-by—as much whoop-de-do as we get in Los Angeles when they open a supermarket."

But Gillis has a soft spot for Desmond, his keeper and executioner, who now starts to walk down her grand foyer staircase, thinking she's being filmed by Cecil B. DeMille, ready for her close-up. "So they were turning after all, those cameras," Gillis says in his final lines. "Life, which can be strangely merciful, had taken pity on Norma Desmond. The dream she had clung to so desperately had enfolded her." And so did Gillis's dream: he is now enfolded in the movie, as alive as a tale told by a corpse. ❧

HOWARD KARREN studied semiotics at Brown, got his MFA at Columbia's film school, and worked as an editor at *Premiere Magazine* for thirteen years. He runs the *FilmArt* series at Whaler's Wharf Cinema, writes a regular column of DVD reviews for the *Banner*, and co-owns the Alden Gallery in Provincetown.

What thou lovest well remains, the rest is dross.

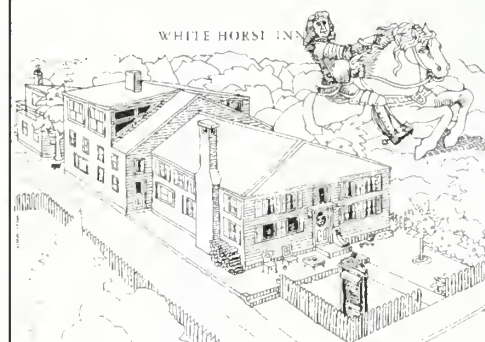


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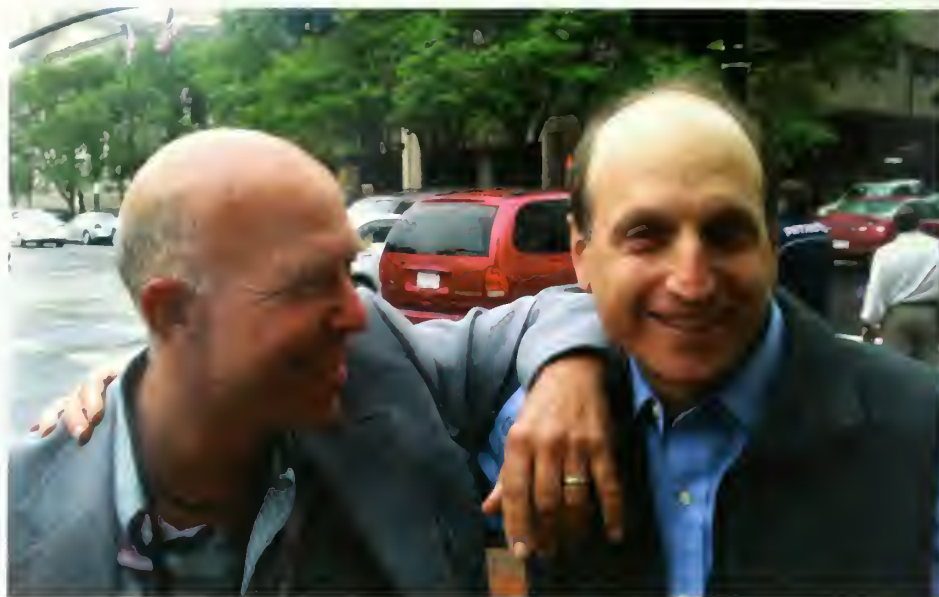


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SETH ROLBEIN AND DAN WOLF PHOTO BY JAY COLBURN

## Senator Dan Wolf

### REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

By Seth Rolbein

**DAN WOLF IS A MOST UNUSUAL**, even unlikely, Cape and Islands State Senator. Consider this path to Beacon Hill.

Born in Philly, his father a successful business entrepreneur and his mother a professor of American history at the University of Pennsylvania, he attended a Quaker school, Germantown Friends, and then headed to Wesleyan University to major in political science. That led to a stint as a community and union organizer in Boston. But flying was also a deep passion; it's safe to say he became the only Wesleyan graduate to advance his degree by schooling to become both a certified airplane mechanic and pilot.

Dan's family summered on the Cape all his life, and he moved here year-round about thirty-five years ago to run Chatham's small airport. He then started what would become Cape Air, which in a quarter century has not only survived when many other airlines failed but grown from a staff of six to one thousand (many of whom now share stock in the company via an employee ownership plan), spreading from the Cape to as far away as Guam and the Caribbean.

So there are hints of politics here—the college major, union organizing, employee ownership—but not the typical political path most trace as they pursue local office first and then push upward. Instead, he committed years to his own sense of community service, including stints working with many of the area's nonprofits, including WOMR radio, the Association to Preserve Cape Cod, the Housing Assistance Corporation, and the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod, as well as becoming president of the Cape's Chamber of Commerce, serving on a local bank board, and acting as an advisor at the Federal Reserve Bank in Boston.

Here were the arenas where the community activist was able to express himself, even as Cape Air developed a reputation for being one of the most philanthropic businesses in the area. And it was this network and these deep roots that made his first go at elected office, a run for state senate, unlikely but plausible, and winnable; in 2010, a tough year for Democrats, he won by almost fifteen points.

My role in all this is another unlikely scenario. I've been a journalist all my life. Throughout, Dan has been a friend, a small word that covers a deep well of shared experiences over the course of thirty years. And so it seemed natural to step out of my journalist's role and support him in his campaign, then his senatorial work, trusting his vision and commitment.

That said, it was fun to readopt the journalist persona, and engage in the following Q&A.



**SETH ROLBEIN** *I'm thinking back to when you decided to run, just two years ago now. You'd built a successful life, a great company in Cape Air, you had a wonderful family, you were really at the cusp of a lot of things. Yet you chose to step into the crucible of public life.*

**DAN WOLF** The epiphany I had was looking at my three daughters, looking at the world we're preparing to pass off to them, looking back at the last thirty years and where we were in the '60s and '70s, understanding our legacy, and wanting to do something to change our trajectory. There are a lot of great things about our political system, but I also realized that very few people have the opportunity to do this. It's a real privilege and blessing, because I'm at a point in my life where, fortunately, I've been relatively successful, and I can take this on. So this is a move for the community I love and the beliefs I think many of us share. It's a beautiful opportunity.

**SR** *In your first term you've been talking a lot about jobs and job creation. But you've also been focused on arts and culture, and the relationships between a vibrant arts culture and a vibrant economy.*

**DW** One of the things I keep saying over and over, as far as a goal, is that we should inspire the creative mind and engage the intellect. That resonates so well in our district. The Cape and Islands has always attracted, inspired, and enlightened talented artists who represent our area so well, but that really applies to all of us. It's impossible to live here and not be blown away by the natural beauty, and the creativity that surrounds us.

I serve on the Arts and Culture Committee. I also was named cochair of the Arts and Culture Caucus up there at the State House, which is an honor. And our State Representative Sarah Peake is one of the chairs of the Arts and Culture Committee. So there's recognition around the state that we're a huge and vibrant part of the culture of the state of Massachusetts.

**SR** *I'd imagine how artists look at the world could help define a political process.*

**DW** That way of thinking serves as both a reflection and a prism, through which the creative mind sees the world around us. It's so good at stripping away a lot of—can I say bullshit?

**SR** Sure.

**DW** And really laying bare what is going on, and presenting it in ways that stimulate us to look for good, thoughtful solutions.

**SR** *That speaks to education. Seems like the first thing everyone wants to do is cut arts funding, but that would cut out such an important part of what it means to move forward in the world.*

**DW** As someone who's hired literally thousands of people, the entrepreneur in me recognizes that if I could bet on who is going to be successful in this world, even the world of business, based on either five years of arts classes or five years of business classes, I'd take the arts. The creative side that gets to problem solving and seeing things from so many different perspectives, in so many rich ways, is as important if not more important than any core curriculum training. So the last thing we want to do is cut out education that nurtures the creative side of the mind.

**SR** *Speaking of being an entrepreneur, do you think people know that Cape Air started in Provincetown?*

**DW** We serve communities literally all over the world, nineteen different states, commonwealths, and countries, but most people have no idea the first flight was Provincetown to Boston, October 16, 1989. And that was our only route for the first three years. I was the pilot. And our congressman at the time, Gerry Studds, was a passenger. I remember it like it was yesterday.

**SR** *That is such a remarkable flight, especially coming in this direction.*

**DW** You go from one of the busiest, most controlled, most urban airports in the United States to an uncontrolled airport in a national park, and it happens in eighteen minutes. And you're flying over whales, some of the most beautiful maritime scenery, and then the amazing beaches, with the monument looming to the south. It doesn't get any better than that.

**SR** *Do you still pilot Cape Air flights?*

**DW** In summer, on the weekends, I do. I wouldn't have it any other way, and it's still Provincetown to Boston. I get to the airport by 5:30 a.m. or so, and fly as much of the day as I can unless I have a scheduling conflict. It's funny, sometimes I introduce myself to the passengers, and I say that I'm the founder of the company, and the CEO, and also happen to be the state senator. I'm sure some of them are like, "Yeah, right, this pilot's got a real imagination!"

**SR** *(Laughter) Must give you a very interesting perspective on the region you represent, to see it from that height.*

**DW** That's a really good point. I can remember what the Cape looked like from the air thirty-five years ago. I can see the incredible changes in the barrier beaches, erosion, the shoreline evolving, and also the incredible changes we've made as humans. It's especially obvious at night, with all the lights—it's amazing how much we've grown.

**SR** *It's enough to make you an environmentalist.*

**DW** You cannot fly around here for thirty-five years, as I have, and not say, "We have to protect this place." Obviously there's a balance between that and economic growth, but there's no place more beautiful than this place I'm blessed to serve.

**SR** *I've heard you say this must be the best senatorial district in the country.*

**DW** It's not big geographically, but in terms of natural beauty, diversity, and community, with the islands as well, I'd surely say so. I always say that the other legislators up there have "district envy."

**SR** *(Laughter) So have you been finding kindred spirits at the State House? Like-minded souls?*

**DW** In a word, yes. There are people there who believe very much in the political process and public service. But I think there is a numbness right now to the world that's surrounded us in the last generation. I'm still trying to get my arms around why that is. I make the joke sometimes, for those who know the great movie we all see around the holiday season, that sometimes I feel like I went to bed in Bedford Falls and woke up in Pottersville.

The world has become controlled by forces that in many ways defy the community we want to live in.

**SR** *You've taken an opportunity to try to change that trajectory, as you put it.*

**DW** If we don't, we become part of the problem. But again, that's where I draw strength from a creative community. Arts and culture have always run counter to those powerful forces in our culture. Even though a lot of the creative economy gets absorbed into the larger economy, there's always a cutting edge and leading edge to this community.

**SR** *What's that great Leonard Cohen line? "There's a crack..."*

**DW** "... a crack in everything—That's how the light gets in."

I could play that right now if you want to—I've got it right here. (Laughter) But it's really true. It's that crack, that imperfection, that continually allows us to see and reassess and move forward. And this is a really important time to move forward and recognize the changes we need to make.

**SR** *Is that why you've expressed so much interest in the Occupy Movement, people bringing issues of economic inequality to the streets and encampments last year? I know you were in Boston walking with people, and in New York too.*

**DW** Yeah. One of the beautiful things about artistic expression is that it comes from a place of the heart and the mind. So I think the Occupy Movement is a natural expression, almost in an artistic way, a desire to express how we're feeling about today in the context of how the world is changing around us. And it's asking us fundamental questions, challenging us in a lot of ways that hopefully take us to a better place.

**SR** *Well, this summer, Provincetown's a better place.*

**DW** It sure is.



SETH ROLBEIN has traveled the world as a journalist—creating book-length nonfiction and fiction, magazine work in Boston and nationally, and a half-dozen documentaries that have aired on National Public Television—but always returns to the Cape, where he began as a cub reporter in 1976. He was founding editor and publisher of the Cape Cod Voice, created in 2001 and lasting seven years. He is currently Senior Advisor to Senator Dan Wolf, and lives in Wellfleet.

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# Dressing Up & Stepping Out in Provincetown

By Stephen Borkowski

ABOVE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): 1916 COSTUME BALL AT THE PROVINCETOWN HALL COURTESY THE PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION AND MUSEUM; SINGLE COSTUMED WOMAN IN ORIENTAL DRESS; STEPHEN BORKOWSKI WITH ARTIST MATTHEW BENEDICT FROM NEW YORK AT THE SPAIN PARTY

## A BOSTON NEWSPAPER REVIEW

from 1926 gushed in a headline, "Provincetown Art Ass'n Holds Big Ball" and then continued: "The beaux-arts and the quasi-arts balls that yearly lure thousands of tourists to cross oceans and continents, were equaled here in this little Cape town; perhaps they even were eclipsed in the kaleidoscopic coloring and in the daring originality of the costumes worn by the artists, writers, and vacationers who had come from all parts of the country for this event." Two years earlier, the headline of the *Boston Sunday Post* sang out, "Artists frolic through riot of color at Provincetown Association Ball." The festive and colorful tone had been set for such events.

Without much effort, one can visualize the shimmering glow of reflected light of the gas fixtures from the original Pompeian red on the auditorium walls, a grandeur re-created during the restoration of the Town Hall auditorium. A 1926 review notes the stunning effect of the original setting: "Brilliant scintillating costumes, some grotesque, others exquisite in their beauty, coupled with special features that sizzled and crackled in an

atmosphere of good fun that cannot be reproduced anywhere else except in this one little town on the tip of the Cape." The succeeding dance hours were described as "freighted with pleasure," and by midnight the crowd of costumed revelers swelled to a thousand or more. These breathless reports epitomized the scene for many decades as the tradition gained momentum.

If there was a single source of inspiration for the costume balls in Provincetown, perhaps it was the one that originated in Paris in 1892 as a conclusion for the school term at the École des Beaux-Arts in the late spring of each year. The "Ball of the Four Arts" challenged the students to appear in costumes arranged in four themes: architecture, sculpture, painting, and engraving. At the 1926 costume ball at the Art Association, a nod to Paris was expressed when Miss Sallie Sheldon of New York was the "wild woman" described in a photo caption: "Under the towering shadow of the Pilgrim's Monument, a miniature Paris was reproduced here tonight. On the same site in the Town Hall where the stern drab-colored Pilgrim fathers

once debated, a mass of color, a swirl of velvet and brocade skirts about silken and nude ankles danced the 12th annual costume ball of the Provincetown Art Association into history."

From its inception, the Provincetown Town Hall, dedicated in 1886, has been a venue for various fetes. A glimpse into its history is supported by the large number of broadsides contained in the collection of the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum, which heralded many of these events. Most notable and frequent among them were the artist-initiated costume dances, often called balls.

The first artist events appear to have been held, according to an account of Joseph Hawthorne, son of the painter Charles Hawthorne, in the large Hawthorne studio, where the artist held his classes on Miller Hill. Similar events were familiar in New York, sponsored by the *Masses*, the socialist magazine, which mentions costume dances as early as its 1911 issue. Certainly, artists who wintered in Greenwich Village were participants or otherwise aware of these events. The Provincetown Art Association began its tradition unceremoniously, as recorded





ABOVE: COURTESY OF MARC JACOBS, WE OFFER AN ALBUM OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PARTY

in its minutes of July 8, 1915: "It was voted that the Art Association give a Fancy Dress Ball some time in August. The Entertainment Committee were given authority to enlist others to help in preparing for the Ball."

After the event, the minutes noted, "On the evening of August 21, the Costume Dance was given in Town Hall and was a great success socially and financially." The *Provincetown Advocate* embellished that statement: "Happily conceived, well carried out, the ball of the Art Association was just one delightful function, and that it was well patronized is shown when we say that a bit more than three hundred dollars was received at the door and elsewhere through ticket sales."

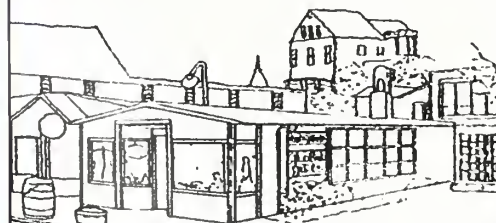
The following year, the second Art Association fete was attended by "many hundreds of permanent and transient residents [and] the scene within walls was one of beauty and gaiety." The year 1916 was, according to artist Marsden Hartley, the "Great Provincetown Summer"—this was also the year he won the prize for "most artistic" for his exotic "East Indian" garb. His costume was

strikingly similar to the one he wore at the Society Arts Ball in Paris in June of 1913, replete with turban and robes decorated with pears, which garnered him much attention from young men, much to his delight. He related this fact to fellow artist Charles Demuth, in whose close company he spent the summer in Provincetown, both as guests of writer John Reed. A derivation of Demuth's name also appears in the roster of costumed participants as "Harlequin" for this event, as reported by the *Boston Globe*.

The Beachcombers, an artists' club in Provincetown founded in 1916, later followed suit and held similar events, beginning in the 1920s and continuing with some interruption through the 1950s. Artists were frequently pressed into service as entertainers and asked to create artwork as prizes for the winners of the costume contests. Norman Rockwell, who first came to Provincetown as a student of Charles Hawthorne, was listed among the judges for the thirty-first anniversary "Comic Strip" costume ball sponsored by the Beachcombers on August 8, 1947.

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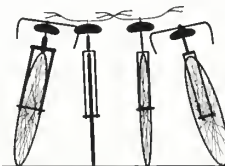
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Certainly not limited by institutional sponsorship, there were balls in Provincetown organized by the police, firemen, and fraternal organizations. The summer of 1949 saw the annual Firemen's Benefit Association Ball, the Beachcombers Ball, and the Artists' Ball, such was the variety and interest in these events.

As with Greenwich Village, the "Safe Harbor of Refuge" of Provincetown allowed a more creative and daring form of dress, spawning creations such as a Peruvian idol, Egyptian king, Napoleonic hussar, Chinese boy with hat, along with fairies, brownies, elves, gypsies, Charlie Chaplin, and every character in history or fiction. Pilgrim dress was especially popular in 1920 when the three-hundredth anniversary of the Pilgrim landing in Provincetown was commemorated.

Each succeeding year reported a previously unrivaled spectacle. "Thousands of dollars worth of rare jewels sparked against priceless old silks, for not a costume had been conceived without weeks of thought," a reviewer wrote later in the '20s, noting this sharp contrast to the drab Pilgrim garb worn in previous years.

Masquerade and costume balls were a staple of Gilded Age society in America and Europe, and artists could always be counted on to add their magic to the mix. However, despite the sense of freedom and creativity inherent in these celebrations, the eighth annual ball, presented by the Art Association in 1922, saw the announcement that each costume would be passed by a censor "before it can be gazed at generally." This was thought necessary in order to prevent immodesty in behavior and dress, prompted

by a Beachcombers Ball a year earlier where some costumes were judged to have been "scanty and others risqué." While some ball-goers in Provincetown arrived masked, the law in Massachusetts required, "In every instance the wearer was obliged to unmask before being admitted to the hall."

The artist John Dowd has kept the tradition alive over the years every Fourth of July weekend in the yard of his home on Commercial Street. Such themes as "Provincetown Millionaires," "Spain: From the Inquisition to Almodovar," "A Passage to India," and others have guided the participants in their inventive re-creations.

Last Halloween, the fashion designer Marc Jacobs and his business partner, Robert Duffy, arranged to celebrate the refurbishing of our Town Hall with another grand ball. Covered in great detail by the *Boston Globe* and other local newspapers and electronic media, the consensus was that the 2011 ball was a resounding success, launching a new chapter for the dowager auditorium. But more than just a revival, the beaux arts ball is a continuation of Provincetown's long-time tradition of freedom, tolerance, and celebration of the arts. A tradition that will hopefully be continued long into the future. ▲

*STEPHEN BORKOWSKI has a long history in administration of nonprofit institutions. A graduate of the Paier School of Art in Hamden, Connecticut, he is active in many civic functions in Provincetown, where he serves currently as Chair of the Provincetown Art Commission. He has been recognized for his research on early Modernists in Provincetown, such as Edna Boies Hopkins, Blanche Lazzell, and E. Ambrose Webster.*

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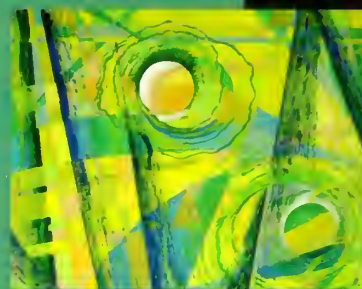
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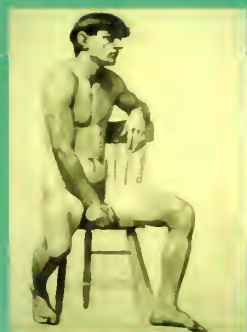
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